

# THE U.S. ARMY IN VIETNAM

## BACKGROUND, BUILDUP, AND OPERATIONS, 1950–1967

**T**he Vietnam War was complex in its origins and followed France's failure to suppress nationalist forces in Indochina as it struggled to restore its colonial dominion after World War II. Led by Ho Chi Minh, a Communist-dominated revolutionary movement, the Viet Minh, waged a political and military struggle for Vietnamese independence that frustrated the efforts of the French and resulted ultimately in their ouster from the region.

The U.S. Army's first encounters with Ho Chi Minh were brief and generally sympathetic. During World War II, Ho's anti-Japanese resistance fighters helped to rescue downed American pilots and furnished information on Japanese forces in Indochina. U.S. Army officers stood at Ho's side in August 1945 as he basked in the short-lived satisfaction of declaring Vietnam's independence. Five years later, however, in an international climate tense with ideological and military confrontation between Communist and non-Communist powers, Army advisers of the newly formed U.S. Military Assistance Advisory Group (MAAG), Indochina, were aiding France against the Viet Minh. With combat raging in Korea and mainland China having recently fallen to the Communists, the war in Indochina now appeared to Americans as one more pressure point to be contained on a wide arc of Communist expansion in Asia. By underwriting French military efforts in Southeast Asia, the United States enabled France to sustain its economic recovery and to contribute, through the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO), to the collective defense of Western Europe.

Provided with aircraft, artillery, tanks, vehicles, weapons, and other equipment and supplies, a small portion of which they distributed to an anti-Communist Vietnamese army they had organized, the French did not fail for want of equipment. Instead, they put American aid at the

service of a flawed strategy that sought to defeat the elusive Viet Minh in set-piece battles but neglected to cultivate the loyalty and support of the Vietnamese people. Too few in number to provide more than a veneer of security in most rural areas, the French were unable to suppress the guerrillas or to prevent the underground Communist shadow government from reappearing whenever French forces left one area to fight elsewhere.

The French fought the last and most famous of the set-piece battles in Indochina at Dien Bien Phu. Located near the Laotian border in a rugged valley in remote northwestern Vietnam, Dien Bien Phu was far from the coast and depended almost entirely on air resupply. The French, expecting the Viet Minh to invade Laos, occupied Dien Bien Phu in November 1953 to force a battle. They established their positions in a valley surrounded by high ground that the Viet Minh quickly fortified. While bombarding the besieged garrison with artillery and mortars, the attackers tunneled closer to the French positions. Supply aircraft that successfully ran the gauntlet of intense antiaircraft fire risked destruction on the ground from Viet Minh artillery. Eventually, supplies and ammunition could be delivered to the defenders only by parachute drop. As the situation became critical, France asked the United States to intervene. Believing that the French position was untenable and that even massive American air attacks using small nuclear bombs would be futile, General Matthew B. Ridgway, the Army Chief of Staff, helped to convince President Dwight D. Eisenhower not to aid them. Ridgway also opposed the use of U.S. ground forces, arguing that such an effort would severely strain the Army and possibly lead to a wider war in Asia.

Dien Bien Phu surrendered on May 7, 1954, just as peace negotiations were about to start in Geneva. On July 20 France and the Viet Minh agreed to end hostilities and to divide Vietnam temporarily into two zones at the 17th Parallel. (*Map 11*) In the North, the Viet Minh established a Communist government with its capital at Hanoi. French forces withdrew to the South; hundreds of thousands of civilians, most of whom were Roman Catholics, accompanied them. The question of unification was left to be decided by an election scheduled for 1956.

## The Emergence of South Vietnam

As the Viet Minh consolidated control in the North, Ngo Dinh Diem, a Roman Catholic of mandarin background, sought to assert his authority over the chaotic conditions in South Vietnam in hopes of establishing an anti-Communist state. A one-time minister in the French colonial administration, Diem enjoyed a reputation for honesty. He had resigned his office in 1933 and had taken no part in the tumultuous events that swept over Vietnam after World War II. Diem returned to Saigon in the summer of 1954 as premier with no political following except his family and a few Americans. His authority was challenged, first by the independent Hoa Hao and Cao Dai religious sects and then by the Binh Xuyen, an organization of gangsters that controlled Saigon's gambling dens and brothels and had strong influence with the police. Rallying an army, Diem defeated the sects and gained their grudging



Map 11

## NGO DINH DIEM (1901–1963)

Diem, a Catholic from the imperial city of Hue in central Vietnam, knew when he became leader of South Vietnam in 1954 that his base of support was thin in that mostly Buddhist country. He therefore entrusted close family members, most notably his shrewd and secretive brother Ngo Dinh Nhu and Nhu's beautiful and outspoken wife Madame Nhu, to run the most important parts of the government while he used a combination of political favors and strong-arm tactics to keep his rivals weak and divided. For Diem, the Viet Cong were but one of many dangers to his regime.



*President Diem meets with village elders.*

allegiance. Remnants of their forces fled to the jungle to continue their resistance; some at a later date became the nucleus of Communist guerrilla units.

Diem was also challenged by members of his own army, where French influence persisted among the highest-ranking officers. But he weathered the threat of an army coup, dispelling American doubts about his ability to survive in the jungle of Vietnamese politics. For the next few years, the American commitment to defend South Vietnam's independence was synonymous with support for Diem. Americans now provided advice and support to the Army of the Republic of Vietnam; at Diem's request, they replaced French advisers throughout his nation's military establishment.

As the American role in South Vietnam was growing, U.S. defense policy was undergoing review. Officials in the Eisenhower administration believed that wars like those in Korea and Vietnam were too costly and ought to be avoided in the future. "Never again" was the rallying cry of those who opposed sending U.S. ground forces to fight a conventional war in Asia. Instead, the Eisenhower administration relied on the threat or use of massive nuclear retaliation to deter or, if necessary, to defeat the armies of the Soviet Union or Communist China. Ground forces were relegated to a minor role, and mobilization was regarded as an unnecessary luxury. In consequence, the Army's share of the defense budget declined, the modernization of its forces was delayed, and its strength was reduced by 40 percent: from 1,404,598 in 1954 to 861,964 in 1956.

General Ridgway and his successor, General Maxwell D. Taylor, opposed the Eisenhower administration's new strategy. Both advocated balanced forces to enable the United States to cope realistically with a variety of military contingencies. The events of the late 1950s appeared to support their demand for flexibility. The United States intervened in Lebanon in 1958 to restore political stability there. That same year an American military show of force in the Straits of Taiwan helped to dampen tensions between Communist China and the Nationalist

Chinese government on Taiwan. Both contingencies underlined the importance of avoiding any fixed concept of war.

Advocates of the flexible-response doctrine foresaw a meaningful role for the Army as part of a more credible deterrent and as a means of intervening, when necessary, in limited and small wars. They wished to strengthen both conventional and unconventional forces, to improve strategic and tactical mobility, and to maintain troops and equipment at forward bases close to likely areas of conflict. They placed a premium on highly responsive command and control to allow a close meshing of military actions with political goals. The same reformers were deeply interested in the conduct of brushfire wars, especially among the underdeveloped nations. In the so-called Third World, competing Cold War ideologies and festering nationalistic, religious, and social conflicts interacted with the disruptive forces of modernization to create the preconditions for open hostilities. Southeast Asia was one of several such areas the Army identified. Here, the United States' central concern was the threat of North Vietnamese and perhaps Chinese aggression against South Vietnam and other non-Communist states.

The United States took the lead in forming a regional defense pact, the Southeast Asia Treaty Organization, signaling its commitment to contain Communist encroachment in the region. Meanwhile, the 342 American advisers of MAAG, Vietnam (which replaced MAAG, Indochina, in 1955), trained and organized Diem's fledgling army to resist an invasion from the North. Three MAAG chiefs—Lt. Gens. John W. O'Daniel, Samuel T. Williams, and Lionel C. McGarr—reorganized South Vietnam's light mobile infantry groups into infantry divisions compatible in design and mission with U.S. defense plans. The South Vietnamese Army, with a strength of about 150,000, was equipped with standard U.S. Army equipment and given the mission of delaying the advance of any invasion force until the arrival of American reinforcements. The residual influence of the army's earlier French training, however, lingered in both leadership and tactics. The South Vietnamese had little or no practical experience in administration and the higher staff functions from which the French had excluded them.

The MAAG's training and reorganization work was often interrupted by Diem's using his army to conduct pacification campaigns to root out stay-behind Viet Minh cadre. Hence responsibility for most internal security was transferred to poorly trained and ill-equipped paramilitary forces, the Civil Guard and Self-Defense Corps, which numbered about 75,000. For the most part, the Viet Minh in the South avoided armed action and subscribed to a political action program in anticipation of Vietnam-wide elections in 1956, as stipulated by the Geneva Accords. But Diem, supported by the United States, refused to hold elections, claiming that undemocratic conditions in the North precluded a fair contest. (Some observers thought Ho Chi Minh sufficiently popular in the South to defeat Diem.) Buoyed by his own election as President in 1955 and by the adulation of his American supporters, Diem's political strength rose to its apex. While making some political and economic reforms, he pressed hard his attacks on political opponents and former Viet Minh, many of whom were not Communists at all but patriots who had joined the movement to fight for Vietnamese independence.

## HO CHI MINH (1890–1969)

All his adult life Nguyen Tat Thanh, who used the pseudonym Ho Chi Minh, was a devoted Nationalist. Settling in Paris following World War I, Ho gained renown as the author of a petition to the Allies gathered at Versailles demanding independence for all countries under colonial rule. (The petition was ignored.) Over the next decade Ho's ideology evolved through travels in China and the USSR, and in 1930 he helped form the Indochina Communist Party. Following World War II, Ho became the first president of a provisional Communist government in Vietnam and fought to expel the French. He succeeded in 1954, only to have international politics divide Vietnam in two.



*Ho Chi Minh*

By 1957 Diem's harsh measures had so weakened the Viet Minh that Communist leaders in the South feared for the movement's survival there. The Southerners urged their colleagues in the North to sanction a new armed struggle in South Vietnam. For self-protection, some Viet Minh had fled to secret bases to hide and form small units. Others joined renegade elements of the former sect armies. From bases in the mangrove swamps of the Mekong Delta, in the Plain of Reeds near the Cambodian border, and in the jungle of War Zones C and D north of Saigon, the Communists began to rebuild their armed forces, to reestablish an underground political network, and to carry out propaganda, harassment, and terrorist activities to advance their goals and undermine the people's faith in their government's ability to protect them. As reforms faltered and Diem became more dictatorial, the ranks of the rebels swelled with the politically disaffected.

### The Rise of the Viet Cong

The insurgents, now called the Viet Cong, had by 1959 organized several companies and a few battalions, the majority in the Mekong Delta and the provinces around Saigon. As Viet Cong military strength increased, attacks against the paramilitary forces, and occasionally against the South Vietnamese Army, became more frequent. The guerrillas conducted many to seize equipment, arms, and ammunition but flaunted all their successes as evidence of the government's inability to protect its citizens. Political agitation and military activity also quickened in the Central Highlands, where Viet Cong agents recruited among the Montagnard tribes. In 1959, after assessing conditions in the South, the leaders in Hanoi agreed to resume the armed struggle, giving it equal weight with political efforts to undermine Diem and reunify Vietnam. To attract the growing number of anti-Communists opposed to Diem, as well as to provide a democratic facade for administering the party's policies in areas controlled by the Viet Cong, North Vietnam in December 1960 created the National Liberation Front of South Vietnam. The revival of guerrilla warfare in the South found the advisory group, the South Vietnamese Army, and Diem's gov-

ernment ill prepared to wage an effective campaign. In their efforts to train and strengthen Diem's army, U.S. advisers had concentrated on meeting the threat of a conventional North Vietnamese invasion. The South Vietnamese Army's earlier antiguerrilla campaigns, while seemingly successful, had confronted only a weak and dormant insurgency. The Civil Guard and Self-Defense Corps, which bore the brunt of the Viet Cong's attacks, were not under the MAAG's purview and proved unable to cope with the audacious Viet Cong. Diem's regime, while stressing military activities, neglected political, social, and economic reforms. American officials disagreed over the seriousness of the guerrilla threat, the priority to be accorded political or military measures, and the need for special counterinsurgency training for the South Vietnamese Army. Only a handful of the MAAG's advisers had personal experience in counterinsurgency warfare.

Yet the U.S. Army was no stranger to such conflict. Americans had fought insurgents in the Philippines at the turn of the century, conducted a guerrilla campaign in Burma during World War II, helped the Greek and Philippine governments to subdue Communist insurgencies after the war, and studied the French failure in Indochina and the British success in Malaya. However, the Army did not yet have a comprehensive doctrine for dealing with insurgency. For the most part, insurgent warfare was still equated with the World War II-type of guerrilla or partisan struggles behind enemy lines in support of conventional operations. Only beginning to emerge was an appreciation of the political and social dimensions of insurgency and its role in the larger framework of revolutionary war. Insurgency meant above all a contest for political legitimacy and power—a struggle between contending political cultures over the organization of society. Most Army advisers and Special Forces went to South Vietnam in the early 1960s poorly prepared to wage such a struggle. A victory for counterinsurgency in South Vietnam would require Diem's government not only to outfight the guerrillas but also to compete successfully with their efforts to organize the population in support of the government's cause.

The Viet Cong thrived on their access to and control of the people, who formed the most important part of their support base. The population provided both economic and manpower resources to sustain and expand the insurgency; the people of the villages served the guerrillas as their first line of resistance against government intrusion into their "liberated zones" and bases. By comparison with their political effort, the

## VO NGUYEN GIAP (1912– )

Known for his organizational skills and a mercurial temper, Giap trained a Communist guerrilla army for Ho Chi Minh during World War II and went on to become General and Commander of the People's Army of Vietnam (1946–1972) and the Minister of National Defense (1946–1980). Chief military architect of the Viet Minh victory over the French in the First Indochina War (1946–1954), Giap gained lasting notoriety for capturing the French garrison at Dien Bien Phu in May 1954. During the war against the United States, Giap advocated guerrilla tactics, putting him at odds with Politburo members who pushed for a more conventional struggle.

strictly military aims of the Viet Cong were secondary. The insurgents' goal was not necessarily to destroy government forces—although they did so when they could isolate and defeat weaker elements—but to extend their influence over the population. By mobilizing the population, the Viet Cong compensated for their numerical and material disadvantages. A rule of thumb that ten soldiers were needed to defeat one guerrilla reflected the insurgents' political support rather than their military superiority. For the Saigon government, the task of isolating the Viet Cong from the population was difficult under any circumstances and impossible to achieve by force alone.

Viet Cong military forces ran the gamut from hamlet and village guerrillas, farmers by day and fighters by night, to full-time professional soldiers. Organized into squads and platoons, part-time guerrillas had several military functions. They gathered intelligence, passing it on to district or provincial authorities. They proselytized, propagandized, recruited, and provided security for local cadres. They reconnoitered the battlefield, served as porters and guides, created diversions, evacuated wounded, and retrieved weapons. Their very presence and watchfulness in a hamlet or village inhibited the population from aiding the government.

By contrast, the local and main-force Viet Cong units consisted of full-time soldiers, most often recruited from the area where the unit operated. Forming companies and battalions, local forces were attached to a village, district, or provincial headquarters. Often they formed the protective shield behind which a Communist Party cadre established its political infrastructure and organized new guerrilla elements at the hamlet and village levels. As the link between guerrilla and main-force units, a local force served as a reaction force for the former and as a pool of replacements and reinforcements for the latter. Having limited offensive capability, local forces usually attacked poorly defended, isolated outposts or weaker paramilitary forces, often at night and by ambush. Main-force units were organized as battalions, regiments, and, as the insurgency matured, divisions. Subordinate to provincial, regional, and higher commands, such units were the strongest, most mobile, and most offensive minded of the Viet Cong forces; their mission often was to attack and defeat a specific South Vietnamese unit.

Missions were assigned and approved by a political officer who in most cases was superior to the unit's military commander. Party cells in every unit inculcated and reinforced policy, military discipline, and unit cohesion. Among the insurgents, war was always the servant of policy.

As the Viet Cong's control over the population increased, their military forces grew in number and size. Squads and platoons became companies, companies formed battalions, and battalions were



*Guerrillas Sorting Grain*

organized into regiments. This process of creating and enlarging units continued as long as the Viet Cong had a base of support among the population. After 1959, however, infiltrators from the North also became important. Hanoi activated a special military transportation unit to control overland infiltration along a complex of roads and trails from North Vietnam through Laos and Cambodia. This infiltration network was to be called the Ho Chi Minh Trail. A special naval unit conducted sea infiltration. At first, the infiltrators were Southern-born Viet Minh soldiers who had regrouped in the North after the French Indochina War. Each year until 1964, thousands returned south to join or to form Viet Cong units, usually in the areas where they had originated. Such men served as experienced military or political cadres, as technicians, or as rank-and-file combatants wherever local recruitment was difficult.

When the pool of about 80,000 so-called regroupes ran dry, Hanoi began sending native North Vietnamese soldiers as individual replacements and reinforcements. In 1964 the Communists started to introduce entire North Vietnamese Army units into the South. Among the infiltrators were senior cadres, who manned the expanding Viet Cong command system—regional headquarters, interprovincial commands, and the *Central Office for South Vietnam (COSVN)*, the supreme military and political headquarters. As the Southern branch of the Vietnamese Communist Party, *COSVN* was directly subordinate to the Central Committee in Hanoi. Its senior commanders were high-ranking officers of North Vietnam's Army. To equip the growing number of Viet Cong forces in the South, the insurgents continued to rely heavily on arms and supplies captured from South Vietnamese forces. But, increasingly, large numbers of weapons, ammunition, and other equipment arrived from the North, nearly all supplied by the Sino-Soviet bloc.

From a strength of approximately 5,000 at the start of 1959, the Viet Cong's ranks grew to about 100,000 at the end of 1964. The number of infiltrators alone during that period was estimated at 41,000. The growth of the insurgency reflected not only North Vietnam's skill in infiltrating men and weapons but also South Vietnam's inability to control its porous borders, Diem's failure to develop a credible pacification program to reduce Viet Cong influence in the countryside, and the South Vietnamese Army's difficulties in reducing long-standing Viet Cong bases and secret zones. Such areas facilitated infiltration and served as staging areas for operations: they contained training camps, hospitals, depots, workshops, and command centers. Many bases were in remote areas the South Vietnamese Army seldom visited, such as the U Minh Forest or the Plain of Reeds. But others existed in the heart of populated areas, in the liberated zones. There, Viet Cong forces, dispersed among hamlets and villages, drew support from the local economy. From such centers the Viet Cong expanded their influence into adjacent areas that were nominally under the South Vietnamese government's control.

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## **A New American President Takes Charge**

Soon after John F. Kennedy became President in 1961, he sharply increased military and economic aid to South Vietnam to help Diem defeat the growing insurgency. For Kennedy, insurgencies (or “wars of national liberation” in the parlance of Communist leaders) challenged

international security every bit as seriously as nuclear war. The administration's approach to both extremes of conflict rested on the precepts of the flexible response. Regarded as a form of "sub-limited," or small war, insurgency was treated largely as a military problem—conventional war writ small—and hence susceptible to resolution by timely and appropriate military action. Kennedy's success in applying calculated military pressures to compel the Soviet Union to remove its offensive missiles from Cuba in 1962 reinforced the administration's disposition to deal with other international crises, including the conflict in Vietnam, in a similar manner.

Kennedy's policy, though commendable in its degree of flexibility, also had limitations. Long-term strategic planning typically yielded to short-term crisis management. Planners tended to assume that all belligerents were rational and that the foe subscribed as they did to the seductive logic of the flexible response. Hoping to give the South Vietnamese a margin for success, Kennedy periodically authorized additional military aid and support between 1961 and November 1963, when he was assassinated. But the absence of a coherent operational strategy for the conduct of counterinsurgency and chronic military and political shortcomings on the part of the South Vietnamese nullified potential benefits.

The U.S. Army played a major role in Kennedy's "beef up" of the American advisory and support efforts in South Vietnam. In turn, that role was made possible in large measure by Kennedy's determination to increase the strength and capabilities of Army forces for both conventional and unconventional operations. Between 1961 and 1964, the Army's strength rose from about 850,000 to nearly 1 million men and the number of combat divisions grew from eleven to sixteen. These increases were backed up by an ambitious program to modernize Army equipment and, by stockpiling supplies and equipment at forward bases, to increase the deployability and readiness of Army combat forces. The buildup, however, did not prevent the callup of 120,000 reservists to active duty in the summer of 1961, a few months after Kennedy assumed office. Facing renewed Soviet threats to force the Western Powers out of Berlin, Kennedy mobilized the Army to reinforce NATO, if need be. But the mobilization revealed serious shortcomings in Reserve readiness and produced a swell of criticism and complaints from Congress and reservists alike. Although Kennedy sought to remedy the exposed deficiencies and set in motion plans to reorganize the Reserves, the unhappy experience of the Berlin Crisis was fresh in the minds of national leaders when they faced the prospect of war in Vietnam a few years later.

Facing trouble spots in Latin America, Africa, and Southeast Asia, Kennedy took a keen interest in the U.S. Army Special Forces, formed in 1952 to prepare to lead guerrilla wars against the Soviet Union in Eastern Europe. He believed their skills in unconventional warfare also made them well suited to countering insurgency. During his first year in office, he increased the strength of the Special Forces from about 1,500 to 9,000 and authorized them to wear distinctive headgear: the green beret. In the same year he greatly enlarged their role in South Vietnam. First under the auspices of the Central Intelligence Agency and then under a military commander, the Special Forces organized the highland tribes into the Civilian Irregular Defense Group (CIDG) and in time

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*Special Forces troops lead a Montagnard commando team on a mission in I Corps.*

sought to recruit other ethnic groups and sects in the South as well. To this scheme, underwritten almost entirely by the United States, Diem gave only tepid support. Indeed, the civilian irregulars drew strength from groups traditionally hostile to the South Vietnamese government. Treated with disdain by the lowland Vietnamese, the Montagnards developed close, trusting relations with their Army advisers. Special Forces detachment commanders frequently were the real leaders of CIDG units. This strong, mutual bond of loyalty between adviser and highlander benefited operations, but some tribal leaders sought to exploit the special relationship to advance Montagnard political autonomy. On occasion, Special Forces advisers found themselves in the awkward position of mediating between militant Montagnards and South Vietnamese officials who were suspicious and wary of the Americans' sympathy for the highlanders.

Through a village self-defense and development program, the Special Forces aimed initially to create a military and political buffer to the growing Viet Cong influence in the Central Highlands. Within a few years, approximately 60,000 highlanders had enlisted in the CIDG program. As their participation increased, so too did the range of Special Forces activities. In addition to village defense programs, the Green Berets sponsored offensive guerrilla activities and border surveillance and control measures. To detect and impede the Viet Cong, the Special Forces established camps astride infiltration corridors and near enemy base areas, especially along the Cambodian and Laotian borders. But the camps themselves were vulnerable to enemy attack and, despite their presence, infiltration continued. At times, border control diverted tribal units from village defense, the original heart of the CIDG program.



*Valor in Vietnam, John Witt, 1965*

By 1965, as the military situation in the highlands worsened, many CIDG units had changed their character and begun to engage in quasi-conventional military operations. In some instances, irregulars under the leadership of Army Special Forces stood up to crack enemy regiments, offering much of the military resistance to enemy efforts to dominate the highlands. Yet the Special Forces—despite their efforts in South Vietnam and in Laos, where their teams helped to train and advise anti-Communist Laotian forces in the early 1960s—did not provide an antidote to the virulent insurgency in Vietnam. Longstanding animosities between Montagnard and Vietnamese prevented close, continuing, cooperation between the South Vietnamese Army and the irregulars. Long on promises but short on action to improve the lot of the Montagnards, successive South Vietnamese regimes failed to win the loyalty of the tribesmen. And the Special Forces usually operated in areas remote from the main Viet Cong threat to the heavily populated and economically important Mekong Delta and coastal regions of the country.

Besides the Special Forces, the Army's most important contribution to the fight was the helicopter. Neither President Kennedy nor the Army anticipated the rapid growth of aviation in South Vietnam when the first helicopter transportation companies arrived in December 1961. Within three years, however, each of South Vietnam's divisions and corps was supported by Army helicopters, with the faster,

more reliable, and versatile UH-1 Iroquois, or Huey, replacing the older H-21 Shawnee. In addition to transporting men and supplies, helicopters were used to reconnoiter, to evacuate wounded, and to provide command and control. The Vietnam conflict became the crucible in which Army airmobile and air-assault tactics evolved. As armament was added first machine gun-wielding door-gunners, and later rockets and miniguns, armed helicopters began to protect troop carriers against antiaircraft fire, to suppress enemy fire around landing zones during air assaults, and to deliver fire support to troops on the ground.

Army fixed-wing aircraft also flourished. Equipped with a variety of detection devices, the OV-1 Mohawk conducted day and night surveillance of Viet Cong bases and trails. The CV-2 Caribou, which the Air Force later called the C-7, with its sturdy frame and ability to land and take off on short, unimproved airfields, proved ideal to supply remote camps.



*An H-21 helicopter lifts South Vietnamese troops into battle near Saigon.*

Army aviation revived old disagreements with the Air Force over the roles and missions of the two services and the adequacy of Air Force close air support. The expansion of the Army's own "air force" nevertheless continued, abetted by the Kennedy administration's interest in extending airmobility to all types of land warfare, from counterinsurgency to the nuclear battlefield. Secretary of Defense Robert S. McNamara himself encouraged the Army to test an experimental air-assault division. During 1963 and 1964, the Army demonstrated that helicopters could successfully replace ground vehicles for mobility and provide fire support in lieu of ground artillery. The result was the creation in 1965 of the 1st Cavalry Division (Airmobile), the first such unit in the Army. In South Vietnam, the helicopter's effect on organization and operations was as sweeping as the influence of mechanized forces in World War II. Many of the operational concepts of airmobility, rooted in cavalry doctrine and operations, were pioneered by helicopter units between 1961 and 1964 and later adopted by the new airmobile division and by all Army combat units that fought in South Vietnam.

In addition to Army Special Forces and helicopters, Kennedy greatly expanded the entire American advisory effort. Advisers were placed at the sector (provincial) level and were permanently assigned to infantry battalions and certain lower-echelon combat units; additional intelligence advisers went to South Vietnam. The Army made wide use of temporary training teams in psychological warfare, civic action, engineering, and a variety of logistical functions. With the expansion of the advisory and support efforts came demands for better communications, intelligence, and medical, logistical, and administrative support, all of which the Army provided from its active forces, drawing upon skilled men and units from U.S.-based forces. The result was a slow, steady erosion of its capacity to meet worldwide contingency obligations. But if Vietnam depleted the Army, it also provided certain advantages. The war was a laboratory in which to test and evaluate new equipment and techniques applicable to counterinsurgency—among others, the use of chemical defoliants and herbicides, both to remove the jungle canopy that gave cover to the guerrillas and to destroy their crops. As the activities of all the services expanded, U.S. military strength in South Vietnam increased from under 700 at the start of 1960 to almost 24,000 by the end of 1964. Of these, 15,000 were Army, including a little over 2,000 Army advisers.

Changes in American command arrangements attested to the growing commitment. In February 1962 the Joint Chiefs of Staff established the U.S. Military Assistance Command, Vietnam (MACV), in Saigon as the senior American military headquarters in South Vietnam and appointed General Paul D. Harkins as commander (COMUSMACV).



*U.S. Adviser Planning Operations with South Vietnamese Troops*

Harkins reported to the Commander in Chief, Pacific, in Hawaii but because of high-level interest in South Vietnam enjoyed special access to military and civilian leaders in Washington as well. Soon MACV moved into the advisory effort hitherto directed by the Military Assistance Advisory Group. To simplify the advisory chain of command, the latter was disestablished in May 1964 and MACV took direct control. As the senior Army commander in South Vietnam, the MACV commander also commanded Army support units; for day-to-day operations, however, control of such units was vested in the corps and division senior advisers. For administrative and logistical support Army units looked to the U.S. Army Support Group, Vietnam (later the U.S. Army Support Command, Vietnam), established in mid-1962.

Though command arrangements worked tolerably well, complaints were heard in and out of the Army. Some officials pressed for a separate Army component commander with responsibility both for operations and for logistical support—an arrangement the other services enjoyed in South Vietnam. Airmen tended to believe that an Army command already existed, disguised as MACV. They believed that General Harkins, though a joint commander, favored the Army in the bitter interservice rivalry over the roles and missions of aviation in South Vietnam. Some critics thought his span of control excessive, for Harkins' responsibility extended to Thailand, where Army combat units had deployed in 1962, aiming to overawe Communist forces in neighboring Laos. The Army undertook several logistical projects in Thailand, and Army engineers, signalmen, and other support forces remained there after combat forces withdrew in the fall of 1962.

While the Americans strengthened their position in South Vietnam and Thailand, the Communists tightened their grip in Laos. Agreements signed in Geneva in 1962 required all foreign military forces to leave that small, land-locked nation. American advisers, including hundreds of Special Forces, departed. But North Vietnam did not honor the agreements. Its army, together with Laotian Communist forces, consolidated its hold on areas adjacent to both North and South Vietnam through which passed the network of jungle roads called the Ho Chi Minh Trail. As a result, it became easier to move supplies south to support the Viet Cong in the face of the new dangers embodied in U.S. advisers, weapons, and tactics.

## Counterinsurgency Falters

At first the enhanced mobility and firepower afforded the South Vietnamese Army by helicopters, armored personnel carriers, and close air support surprised and overwhelmed the Viet Cong. The South Vietnamese government's forces reacted more quickly to insurgent attacks and penetrated many Viet Cong areas. Even more threatening to the insurgents was Diem's strategic hamlet program launched in late 1961. Diem and his brother Ngo Dinh Nhu, an ardent sponsor of the program, hoped to create thousands of new, fortified villages, often by moving peasants from their existing homes. Hamlet construction and defense were the responsibility of the new residents, with paramilitary and South Vietnamese Army forces providing initial security while the peasants were recruited and organized. As security improved, Diem and

## STRATEGIC HAMLETS

The program of fortifying villages to separate the peasants from the insurgents emulated a model the British used successfully in Malaya in the 1950s. In addition to impairing the Viet Cong's control of the countryside, Diem saw the hamlets as a way to solicit more American aid and to control his own population, which outside of the Catholic minority had little enthusiasm for his regime. The program affected nearly one-third of South Vietnam's 14,000 hamlets; but when the government abandoned it in early 1964, only a small percentage of the hamlets remained in friendly hands. Diem's over-ambitious program created too many such hamlets, widely scattered and often indefensible, thus dooming the initiative to failure.

Nhu hoped to enact social, economic, and political reforms that when fully carried out would constitute the central government's revolutionary response to Viet Cong promises of social and economic betterment. If successful, the program might destroy the insurgency by separating and protecting the rural population from the Viet Cong, threatening the rebellion's base of support.

By early 1963, however, the Viet Cong had learned to cope with the South Vietnamese Army's new weapons and more aggressive tactics and had begun a campaign to eliminate the strategic hamlets. The insurgents became adept at countering helicopters and slow-flying aircraft and learned the vulnerabilities of armored personnel carriers. In addition, their excellent intelligence, combined with the predictability of the South Vietnamese Army's tactics and pattern of operations, enabled the Viet Cong to evade or ambush government forces. The new weapons the United States had provided the South Vietnamese did not compensate for the stifling influence of poor leadership, dubious tactics, and inexperience. The much publicized defeat of government forces at the Mekong Delta village of Ap Bac in January 1963 demonstrated both the Viet Cong's skill in countering the South Vietnamese Army's new capabilities and the latter's inherent weaknesses. Faulty intelligence, poorly planned and executed fire support, and overcautious leadership contributed to the outcome. But Ap Bac's significance transcended a single battle. The defeat was a portent of things to come. Now able to challenge regular army units of equal strength in quasi-conventional battles, the Viet Cong were moving into a more intense stage of revolutionary war.

As the Viet Cong became stronger and bolder, the South Vietnamese Army became more cautious and less offensive minded. Government forces became reluctant to respond to Viet Cong depredations in the countryside, avoided night operations, and resorted to ponderous sweeps against vague military objectives, rarely making contact with their enemies. Meanwhile, the Viet Cong concentrated on destroying strategic hamlets, showing that they considered the settlements, rather than the South Vietnamese Army, the greater danger to the insurgency. Poorly defended hamlets and outposts were overrun or subverted by enemy agents who infiltrated with peasants arriving from the countryside.

The Viet Cong's campaign profited from the government's failures. The government built too many hamlets to defend and scattered them

around the countryside, often outside of range for mutual support. Hamlet militia varied from those who were poorly trained and armed to those who were not trained or armed at all. Fearing that weapons given to the militia would fall to the Viet Cong, local officials often withheld arms. Forced relocation, use of forced peasant labor to construct hamlets, and tardy payment of compensation for relocation were but a few reasons why peasants turned against the program. Few meaningful reforms took place. Accurate information on the program's true condition and on the decline in rural security was hidden from Diem by officials eager to please him with reports of progress. False statistics and reports misled U.S. officials, too, about the progress of the counterinsurgency effort.

If the decline in rural security was not always apparent to Americans, the lack of enlightened political leadership on the part of Diem was all too obvious. Diem habitually interfered in military matters: bypassing the chain of command to order operations, forbidding commanders to take casualties, and appointing military leaders on the basis of political loyalty rather than competence. Many military and civilian appointees, especially province and district chiefs, were dishonest and put career and fortune above the national interest. When Buddhist opposition to certain policies erupted into violent antigovernment demonstrations in 1963, Diem's uncompromising stance and use of military force to suppress the demonstrators caused some generals to decide that the President was a liability in the fight against the Viet Cong. On November 1, with American encouragement, a group of reform-minded generals ousted Diem, who was subsequently murdered along with his brother.

Political turmoil followed the coup. Emboldened, the insurgents stepped up operations and increased their control over many rural areas. North Vietnam's leaders decided to intensify the armed struggle, aiming to demoralize the South Vietnamese Army and further undermine political authority in the South. As Viet Cong military activity quickened, regular North Vietnamese Army units began to train for possible intervention in the war. Men and equipment continued to flow down the Ho Chi Minh Trail, with North Vietnamese conscripts replacing the dwindling pool of Southerners who had belonged to the Viet Minh.

### Setting the Stage for Confrontation

The critical state of rural security that came to light after Diem's death again prompted the United States to expand its military aid to Saigon. General Harkins and his successor, General William C. Westmoreland, urgently strove to revitalize pacification and counterinsurgency. Army advisers helped their Vietnamese counterparts to revise national and provincial pacification plans. They retained the concept of fortified hamlets as the heart of a new national counterinsurgency program but corrected the old abuses, at least in theory. To help implement the program, Army advisers were assigned to the subsector (district) level for the first time, becoming more intimately involved in local pacification efforts and in paramilitary operations. Additional advisers were assigned to units and training centers, especially those of the Regional and Popular Forces (formerly called the Civil Guard and Self-Defense Corps). All Army activities, from aviation support to Special Forces,

## WILLIAM C. WESTMORELAND (1914– )

General William Westmoreland, a West Point graduate and highly experienced officer who had served in World War II and Korea, was forced to fight the war in Vietnam under severe limitations. Without the authority to attack North Vietnam, or even the enemy base areas in Laos and Cambodia, he relied instead on attrition to wear the enemy down. Confronted by two interrelated threats—Communist main-force units and guerrillas—Westmoreland chose to emphasize the main-force war, which he considered the more immediate threat. He believed that mobility and firepower could prevent a war of attrition from turning into a stalemate and that by 1967 the North Vietnamese would reach a “cross-over point,” after which they would be unable to re-inforce the war in the South. After Vietnam, General Westmoreland served as Chief of Staff of the U.S. Army from 1968 to 1972.



*General Westmoreland (center) answers questions from the media. Ambassador Maxwell Taylor is on the left.*

were strengthened in a concerted effort to undo the effects of years of Diem’s mismanagement.

At the same time, American officials in Washington, Hawaii, and Saigon began to explore ways to increase military pressure against North Vietnam. In 1964 the South Vietnamese launched covert raids under MACV’s auspices. Some military leaders, however, believed that only direct air strikes against North Vietnam would induce a change in Hanoi’s policies by demonstrating American determination to defend South Vietnam’s independence. Air strike plans ranged from immediate massive bombardment of military and industrial targets to gradually intensifying attacks spanning several months.

The interest in using air power reflected lingering sentiment in the United States against once again involving American ground forces in a land war on the Asian continent. Many of President Lyndon B. Johnson’s advisers—among them General Maxwell D. Taylor, who was appointed Ambassador to South Vietnam in mid-1964—believed that a carefully calibrated air campaign would be the most effective means of exerting pressure against the North and, at the same time, the method least likely to provoke China’s intervention. Taylor deemed conventional U.S. Army ground forces ill suited to engage in day-to-day counterinsurgency operations against the Viet Cong in hamlets and villages. Ground forces might, however, be used to protect vital air bases in the South and to repel any North Vietnamese attack across the demilitarized zone that separated North from South Vietnam. Together, a more vigorous counterinsurgency effort in the South and military pressure against the North might buy time for the South Vietnamese govern-



*President Johnson*

ment to put its political house in order, boost flagging military and civilian morale, and strengthen its military position in the event of a negotiated peace. Taylor and Westmoreland, the senior U.S. officials in South Vietnam, agreed that North Vietnam was unlikely to change its course unless convinced that it could not succeed in the South. Both recognized that air strikes were neither a panacea nor a substitute for military efforts in the South.

As each side undertook more provocative military actions, the likelihood of a direct military confrontation between North Vietnam and the United States increased. The crisis came in early August 1964 in the international waters of the Gulf of Tonkin. North Vietnamese patrol boats attacked U.S. naval vessels surveying North Vietnam's coastal defenses. The Americans promptly launched retaliatory air strikes. At the request of President Johnson, Congress overwhelmingly passed the Southeast Asia Resolution, the so-called Gulf of Tonkin Resolution, authorizing all actions necessary to protect American forces and to provide for the defense of the nation's allies in Southeast Asia. Considered by some in the administration as the equivalent of a declaration of war, this broad grant of authority encouraged Johnson to expand American military efforts within South Vietnam, against North Vietnam, and in Southeast Asia at large.

By late 1964 each side was poised to increase its stake in the war. Regular North Vietnamese Army units had begun moving south and stood at the Laotian frontier, on the threshold of crossing into South Vietnam's Central Highlands. U.S. air and naval forces stood ready to renew their attacks. On February 7, 1965, Communist forces attacked an American compound in Pleiku in the Central Highlands and a few days later bombed American quarters in Qui Nhon. The United States promptly bombed military targets in the North. A few weeks later, President Johnson approved Operation ROLLING THUNDER, a campaign of sustained, direct air strikes of progressively increasing strength against military and industrial targets in North Vietnam. Signs of intensifying conflict appeared in South Vietnam as well. Strengthening forces at all echelons, from village guerrillas to main-force regiments, the Viet Cong quickened military activity in late 1964 and in the first half of 1965. At Binh Gia, a village forty miles east of Saigon in Phuoc Tuy Province, a multiregimental Viet Cong force fought and defeated several South Vietnamese battalions.

By the summer of 1965 the Viet Cong, strengthened by several recently infiltrated North Vietnamese Army regiments, had gained the upper hand over government forces in some areas of South Vietnam. With U.S. close air support and the aid of Army helicopter gunships, South Vietnamese forces repelled many enemy attacks but suffered heavy casualties. Elsewhere, highland camps and border outposts had to be abandoned. South Vietnamese Army losses from battle deaths and desertions amounted to nearly a battalion a week. The government in Saigon was hard pressed to find men to replenish these heavy losses and completely unable to match the growth of Communist forces from local recruitment and infiltration. Some American officials doubted whether the South Vietnamese could hold out until ROLLING THUNDER created pressures sufficiently strong to convince North Vietnam's leaders to reduce the level of combat in the South. General Westmoreland

and others believed that U.S. ground forces were needed to stave off an irrevocable shift of the military and political balance in favor of the enemy.

For a variety of diplomatic, political, and military reasons, President Johnson approached with great caution any commitment of large ground combat forces to South Vietnam. Yet preparations had been under way for some time. In early March 1965, a few days after ROLLING THUNDER began, American marines went ashore in South Vietnam to protect the large airfield at Da Nang—a defensive security mission. Even as they landed, General Harold K. Johnson, Chief of Staff of the Army, was in South Vietnam to assess the situation. Upon returning to Washington, he recommended a substantial increase in American military assistance, including several combat divisions. He wanted U.S. forces either to interdict the Laotian panhandle to stop infiltration or to counter a growing enemy threat in the central and northern provinces.

But President Johnson sanctioned only the dispatch of additional marines to increase security at Da Nang and to secure other coastal enclaves. He also authorized the Army to begin deploying nearly 20,000 logistical troops, the main body of the 1st Logistical Command, to Southeast Asia. (Westmoreland had requested such a command in late 1964.) At the same time, the President modified the marines' mission to allow them to conduct offensive operations close to their bases. A few weeks later, to protect American bases in the vicinity of Saigon, President Johnson approved sending the first Army combat unit, the 173d Airborne Brigade (Separate), to South Vietnam. Arriving from Okinawa in early May, the brigade moved quickly to secure the air base at Bien Hoa, just northeast of Saigon. With its arrival, U.S. military strength in South Vietnam passed 50,000. Despite added numbers and expanded missions, American ground forces had yet to engage the enemy in full-scale combat.

Indeed, the question of how best to use large numbers of American ground forces was still unresolved on the eve of their deployment. Focusing on population security and pacification, some planners saw U.S. combat forces concentrating their efforts in coastal enclaves and around key urban centers and bases. Under this plan, such forces would provide a security shield behind which the Vietnamese could expand the pacification zone; when required, American combat units would venture beyond their enclaves as mobile reaction forces.

This concept, largely defensive in nature, reflected the pattern the first Army combat units to enter South Vietnam had established. But the mobility and offensive firepower of U.S. ground units suggested their use in remote, sparsely populated regions to seek out and engage main-force enemy units as they infiltrated into South Vietnam or emerged from their secret bases. While secure coastal logistical enclaves and base camps still would be required, the weight of the military effort would be focused on the destruction of enemy military units. Yet even in this alternative, American units would serve indirectly as a shield for pacification activities in the more heavily populated lowlands and Mekong Delta. A third proposal had particular appeal to General Johnson. He wished to employ U.S. and allied ground forces across the Laotian panhandle to interdict enemy infiltration into South Vietnam. Here was a more direct and effective way to stop infiltration than the use of

air power. Encumbered by military and political problems, the idea was periodically revived but always rejected. The pattern of deployment that actually developed in South Vietnam was a compromise between the first two concepts.

For any type of operations, secure logistical enclaves at deepwater ports (Cam Ranh Bay, Nha Trang, and Qui Nhon, for example) were a military necessity. In such areas, combat units arrived and bases developed for regional logistical complexes to support the troops. As the administration neared a decision on combat deployment, the Army began to identify and ready units for movement overseas and to prepare mobilization plans for Selected Reserve forces. The dispatch of Army units to the Dominican Republic in May 1965 to forestall a Leftist takeover necessitated only minor adjustments to the buildup plans. The episode nevertheless showed how unexpected demands elsewhere in the world could deplete the strategic reserve, and it underscored the importance of mobilization if the Army was to meet worldwide contingencies and supply trained combat units to Westmoreland as well.

The prospect of deploying American ground forces also revived discussions of allied command arrangements. For a time Westmoreland considered placing South Vietnamese and American forces under a single commander, an arrangement similar to that of U.S. and South Korean forces during the Korean War. In the face of South Vietnamese opposition, however, Westmoreland dropped the idea. Arrangements with other allies varied. Americans in South Vietnam were joined by combat units from Australia, New Zealand, South Korea, and Thailand and by noncombat elements from several other nations. Westmoreland entered into separate agreements with each commander in turn; the compacts ensured close cooperation with MACV but fell short of giving Westmoreland command over the allied forces.

While diversity marked these arrangements, Westmoreland strove for unity within the American buildup. As forces began to deploy to South Vietnam, the Army sought to elevate the newly established U.S. Army, Vietnam (USARV), to a full-fledged Army component command with responsibility for combat operations. But Westmoreland successfully warded off the challenge to his dual role as unified commander of MACV and its Army component. For the remainder of the war, USARV performed solely in a logistical and administrative capacity; unlike MACV's air and naval component commands, the Army component did not exercise operational control over combat forces, Special Forces, or field advisers. However, through its logistical, engineer, signal, medical, military police, and aviation commands established in the course of the buildup, USARV commanded and managed a support base of unprecedented size and scope.

Despite this victory, unity of command over the ground war in South Vietnam eluded Westmoreland, as did overall control of U.S. military operations in support of the war. Most air and naval operations outside of South Vietnam, including ROLLING THUNDER, were carried out by the Commander in Chief, Pacific, and his air and naval commanders from his headquarters thousands of miles away in Hawaii. This patchwork of command arrangements contributed to the lack of a unified strategy, the fragmentation of operations, and the pursuit of parochial service interests to the detriment of the war effort. No single

**Americans in South Vietnam were joined by combat units from Australia, New Zealand, South Korea, and Thailand and by non-combat elements from several other nations.**

American commander had complete authority or responsibility to fashion an overall strategy or to coordinate all military aspects of the war in Southeast Asia. Furthermore, Westmoreland labored under a variety of political and operational constraints on the use of the combat forces he did command. Like the Korean War, the struggle in South Vietnam was complicated by enemy sanctuaries and by geographical and political restrictions on allied operations. Ground forces were barred from operating across South Vietnam's borders in Cambodia, Laos, or North Vietnam, although the border areas of those countries were vital to the enemy's war effort. These factors narrowed Westmoreland's freedom of action and detracted from his efforts to make effective use of American military power.

### **Groundwork for Combat: Buildup and Strategy**

On July 28, 1965, President Johnson announced plans to deploy additional combat units and to increase American military strength in South Vietnam to 175,000 by year's end. The Army already was preparing hundreds of units for duty in Southeast Asia, among them the newly activated 1st Cavalry Division. Other combat units (the 1st Brigade, 101st Airborne Division, and all three brigades of the 1st Infantry Division) were either ready to go or already on their way to Vietnam. Together with hundreds of support and logistical units, these combat units constituted the first phase of the buildup during the summer and fall of 1965.

At the same time Johnson decided not to mobilize any reserve units. The President's decision profoundly affected the manner in which the Army supported and sustained the buildup. To meet the call for additional combat forces, to obtain manpower to enlarge its training base, and to maintain a pool for rotation and replacement of soldiers in South Vietnam, the Army had to increase its active strength over the next three years by nearly 1.5 million men. Necessarily, it relied on larger draft calls and voluntary enlistments, supplementing them with heavy drawdowns of experienced soldiers from units in Europe and South Korea and extensions of some tours of duty to retain specialists, technicians, and cadres who could train recruits or round out deploying units. Combat units assigned to the strategic reserve were used to meet a large portion of MACV's force requirements, and reservists were not available to replace them. Mobilization could have eased the additional burden of providing officers and noncommissioned officers to man the Army's growing training bases. As matters stood, requirements for experienced cadres competed with the demands for seasoned leaders in units deploying to South Vietnam.

The personnel turbulence caused by competing demands for the Army's limited manpower was intensified by a one-year tour of duty in South Vietnam. Large numbers of men were needed to sustain the rotational base, often necessitating the quick return to Vietnam of men with critical skills. The heightening demand for leaders led to accelerated training programs and the lowering of standards for NCOs and junior officers. Moreover, the one-year tour deprived units in South Vietnam of experienced leadership. In time, the infusion of less-seasoned NCOs and officers contributed to a host of morale problems

that afflicted some Army units. At a deeper level, the administration's decision against calling the reserves to active duty sent the wrong signal to friends and enemies alike, implying that the nation lacked the resolution to support an effort of the magnitude needed to achieve American objectives in South Vietnam.

Hence the Army began to organize additional combat units. Three light infantry brigades were activated, and the 9th Infantry Division was reactivated. In the meantime the 4th and 25th Infantry Divisions were alerted for deployment to South Vietnam. With the exception of a brigade of the 25th, all the combat units activated and alerted during the second half of 1965 deployed to South Vietnam during 1966 and 1967. By the end of 1965, U.S. military strength in South Vietnam had reached 184,000; a year later it stood at 385,000; and by the end of 1967 it approached 490,000. Army personnel accounted for nearly two-thirds of the total. Of the Army's eighteen divisions, by the end of 1967 seven were serving in South Vietnam.

Facing a deteriorating military situation, in the summer of 1965 Westmoreland planned to use his combat units to blunt the enemy's spring-summer offensive. As units arrived in the country, he moved them into a defensive arc around Saigon and secured bridgeheads for the arrival of subsequent units. His initial aim was defensive: to stop losing the war and to build a structure that could support a later transition to an offensive campaign. As additional troops poured in, Westmoreland planned to seek out and defeat major enemy forces. Throughout both phases the South Vietnamese, relieved of major combat tasks, were to refurbish their forces and conduct an aggressive pacification program behind the American shield. In a third and final stage, as enemy main-force units were driven into their secret zones and bases, Westmoreland hoped to achieve victory by destroying those sanctuaries and shifting the weight of the military effort to pacification, thereby at last subduing the Viet Cong throughout rural South Vietnam.

The fulfillment of this concept rested not only on the success of American efforts to find and defeat enemy forces, but also on the success of the South Vietnamese government's pacification program. In June 1965 the last in a series of coups that followed Diem's overthrow brought in a military junta headed by Lt. Gen. Nguyen Van Thieu as Chief of State and Air Vice Marshal Nguyen Cao Ky as Prime Minister. The new government provided the political stability requisite for successful pacification. Success hinged also on the ability of the U.S. air campaign against the North to reduce the infiltration of men and materiel, dampening the intensity of combat in the South and inducing Communist leaders in Hanoi to alter their long-term strategic goals. Should any strand of this threefold strategy—the campaign against Communist forces in the South, the South Vietnamese government's pacification program, and the air war in the North—falter, Westmoreland's prospects would become poorer. Yet he was directly responsible for only one element, the U.S. military effort in the South. To a lesser degree, through American advice and assistance to the South Vietnamese forces, he also influenced the South Vietnamese government's efforts to suppress the Viet Cong and to carry out pacification.

**Success hinged also on the ability of the U.S. air campaign against the North to reduce the infiltration of men and materiel, dampening the intensity of combat in the South and inducing Communist leaders in Hanoi to alter their long-term strategic goals.**

## The Highlands, 1965

Spearheaded by at least three North Vietnamese Army regiments, Communist forces mounted a strong offensive in South Vietnam's Central Highlands during the summer of 1965. Overrunning border camps and besieging some district towns, the enemy seemed poised to cut the nation in two. To meet the danger, Westmoreland proposed to introduce the newly organized Army airmobile division, the 1st Cavalry Division, with its large contingent of helicopters, directly into the highlands. Some of his superiors in Hawaii and Washington opposed this plan, preferring to secure coastal bases. Though Westmoreland contended that enclave security made poor use of U.S. mobility and offensive firepower, he was hard pressed to overcome the fear of an American Dien Bien Phu if a unit in the highlands should be isolated and cut off from the sea.

Despite a sparse population and limited economic resources, the highlands were strategically important. Around the key highland towns (Kon-tum, Pleiku, Ban Me Thuot, and Da Lat), the South Vietnamese and their advisers had created enclaves. Allied forces protected the few roads that traversed the highlands, screened the border, and reinforced outposts and Montagnard settlements from which the irregulars and Army Special Forces sought to detect enemy cross-border movements and to strengthen tribal resistance to the Communists. Such border posts and tribal camps, rather than major towns, most often were the object of enemy attacks. Combined with road interdiction, such attacks enabled the Communists to disperse the limited number of defenders and to discourage the maintenance of outposts.

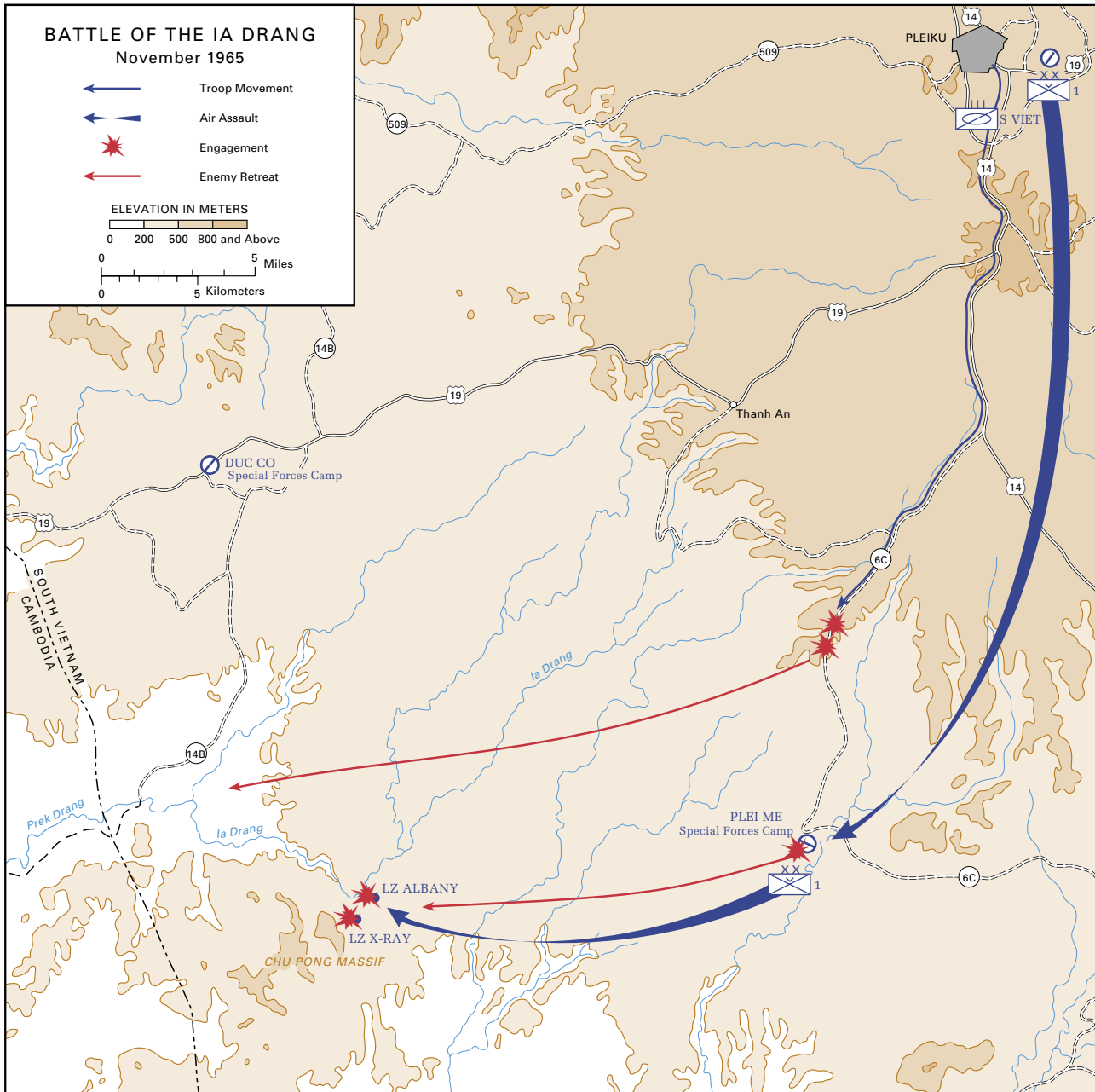
Such actions served a larger strategic objective. The enemy planned to develop the highlands into a major base area from which to mount or support operations in other areas. The Communist-dominated highlands would be a strategic fulcrum, enabling the enemy to shift the weight of his operations to any part of South Vietnam. The highlands were also a potential killing zone where Communist forces could mass. American units arriving there were going to be confronted immediately.

Commanded by Maj. Gen. Harry W. O. Kinnard, the 1st Cavalry Division (Airmobile) moved with its more than 450 helicopters into this hornet's nest in September 1965. It established its main base at An Khe, a government stronghold on Highway 19, halfway between the coastal port of Qui Nhon and the highland city of Pleiku. The location was strategic: at An Khe, the division could help to keep open the vital east-west road from the coast to the highlands and could pivot between the highlands and the coastal districts, where the Viet Cong had made deep inroads.



Dropping in on Charlie, *Michael R. Crook, 1967*

One month later the division received its baptism of fire. The North Vietnamese Army attacked a Special Forces camp at Plei Me; when it was repulsed, Westmoreland directed the division to launch an offensive to locate and destroy enemy regiments that had been identified in the vicinity of the camp. The result was the Battle of the Ia Drang, named for a small river that flowed through the valley, the area of operations. (*Map 12*) For thirty-five days the division pursued and fought the North Vietnamese 32d, 33d, and 66th People's Army of Vietnam (PAVN) Regiments, until the enemy, suffering heavy casualties, returned to his bases in Cambodia.



Map 12

With scout platoons of its air cavalry squadron covering front and flanks, each battalion of the division's 1st Brigade established company bases from which patrols searched for enemy forces. For several days neither ground patrols nor aeroscouts found any trace, but on November 4 the scouts spotted a regimental aid station several miles west of Plei Me. Quick-reacting aerorifle platoons converged on the site. Hovering above, the airborne scouts detected an enemy battalion nearby and attacked from UH-1B Huey gunships with aerial rockets and machine guns. Operating beyond the range of their ground artillery, Army units engaged the enemy in an intense firefight, killing ninety-nine, capturing the aid station, and seizing many documents.

The search for the main body of the enemy continued for the next few days, with Army units concentrating their efforts in the vicinity of the Chu Pong Massif, a mountain range and likely enemy base near the Cambodian border. Communist forces were given little rest, as patrols harried and ambushed them.

The heaviest fighting was yet to come. As the division began the second stage of its campaign, enemy forces began to move out of the Chu Pong base. Units of the U.S. 1st Cavalry Division's 3d Brigade, which took over from the 1st Brigade, advanced to establish artillery bases and landing zones at the base of the mountain. Landing Zone X-RAY was one of several U.S. positions vulnerable to attack by the enemy forces that occupied the surrounding high ground. Here on November 14 began fighting that pitted three battalions against elements of two North Vietnamese regiments. Withstanding repeated mortar attacks and infantry assaults, the Americans used every means of firepower available to them—the division's own gunships, massive artillery bombardment, hundreds of strafing and bombing attacks by tactical aircraft, earth-shaking bombs dropped by B-52 bombers from Guam, and, perhaps most important, the individual soldier's M16 rifle—to turn back a determined enemy. The Communists lost more than 600 dead, the Americans 79.

Although badly hurt, the enemy did not leave the Ia Drang Valley. Elements of the *33d* and *66th PAVN Regiments*, moving east toward Plei Me, encountered the U.S. 2d Battalion, 7th Cavalry, a few miles north of X-RAY at Landing Zone ALBANY, on November 17. The fight that resulted was a bloody reminder of the North Vietnamese mastery of the ambush, as the Communists quickly snared four U.S. companies in their net. As the trapped units struggled for survival, nearly all semblance of organized combat disappeared in the confusion and mayhem. Neither reinforcements nor effective firepower could be brought in. At times combat was reduced to valiant efforts by individuals and small units to avert annihilation. When the fighting ended that night, almost 70 percent of the Americans were casualties and almost one of every three soldiers in the battalion had been killed.

Despite the horrific casualties from the ambush near Landing Zone ALBANY, the Battle of the Ia Drang was lauded as the first major American triumph of the Vietnam War. The airmobile division, committed to combat less than a month after it arrived in country, relentlessly pursued the enemy over difficult terrain and defeated crack North Vietnamese Army units. In part, its achievements underlined the flexibility that Army divisions had gained in the early 1960s under the Reorganiza-

**Replacing the flawed pentomic division with its five lightly armed battle groups, the ROAD division, organized around three brigades, facilitated the creation of brigade and battalion task forces tailored to respond and fight in a variety of military situations.**

tion Objective Army Division (ROAD) concept. Replacing the flawed pentomic division with its five lightly armed battle groups, the ROAD division, organized around three brigades, facilitated the creation of brigade and battalion task forces tailored to respond and fight in a variety of military situations. The newly organized division reflected the Army's embrace of the concept of flexible response and proved eminently suitable for operations in Vietnam. The helicopter was given great credit as well. Nearly every aspect of the division's operations was enhanced by its airmobile capacity. During the battle, artillery units were moved sixty-seven times by helicopter. Intelligence, medical, and all manner of logistical support benefited as well from the speed and flexibility helicopters provided. Despite the fluidity of the tactical situation, airmobile command and control procedures enabled the division to move and keep track of its units over a large area and to accommodate the frequent and rapid changes in command arrangements as units moved from one headquarters to another.

Yet for all the advantages the division accrued from airmobility, its performance was not without blemish. Though the conduct of division-size airmobile operations proved tactically sound, two major engagements stemmed from the enemy's initiative in attacking vulnerable American units. On several occasions massive air and artillery support provided the margin of victory, if not survival. Above all, the division's logistical self-sufficiency fell short of expectations. It could support only one brigade in combat at a time, for prolonged and intense operations consumed more fuel and ammunition than the division's helicopters and fixed-wing Caribou aircraft could supply. Air Force tactical airlift became necessary for resupply. Moreover, in addition to combat losses and damage, the division's helicopters suffered from heavy use and from the heat, humidity, and dust of Vietnam, taxing its maintenance capacity. Human attrition was also high: hundreds of soldiers, the equivalent of almost a battalion, fell victim to a resistant strain of malaria peculiar to Vietnam's highlands.

Westmoreland's satisfaction in blunting the enemy's offensive was tempered by concern that enemy forces might reenter South Vietnam and resume their offensive while the airmobile division recuperated at the end of November and during most of December. He thus requested immediate reinforcements from the Army's 25th Infantry Division, based in Hawaii and scheduled to deploy to South Vietnam in the spring of 1966. By the end of 1965, the division's 3d Brigade had been airlifted to the highlands and, within a month of its arrival, had joined elements of the 1st Cavalry Division to launch a series of operations to screen the border. Army units did not detect any major enemy forces trying to cross from Cambodia into South Vietnam. Each operation, however, killed hundreds of enemy soldiers and refined airmobile techniques, as Army units learned to cope with the vast territorial expanse and difficult terrain of the highlands.

### **Defending Saigon, 1965–1967**

Centered on the defense of Saigon, Westmoreland's concept of operations in the III Corps area had a clarity of design and purpose that was not always apparent elsewhere in South Vietnam. (*Map 13*) Nearly



Map 13

two years would pass before U.S. forces could maintain a security belt around the capital and at the same time attack the enemy's bases. But Westmoreland's ultimate aims and the difficulties he would encounter were foreshadowed by the initial combat operations in the summer and fall of 1965.

The newly arrived 173d Airborne Brigade, joined by a newly arrived Australian infantry unit, began operations in June in War Zone D, a longtime enemy base north of Saigon. Though diverted several times to other tasks, the brigade gained experience in conducting heli-

borne assaults and accustomed itself to the rigors of jungle operations. It also established a pattern of operations that was to grow all too familiar. Airmobile assaults, often in the wake of B-52 air strikes, were followed by extensive patrolling, episodic contact with the Viet Cong, and withdrawal after a few days' stay in the enemy's territory. In early November the airborne soldiers uncovered evidence of the enemy's recent and hasty departure: abandoned camps, recently vacated tunnels, and caches of food and supplies. However, the Viet Cong, by observing the brigade, began to formulate plans for dealing with the Americans.

On November 8, moving deeper into War Zone D, the brigade encountered significant resistance. A Viet Cong battalion attacked and forced the Americans into a tight defensive perimeter. Close-quarters combat ensued as the enemy tried to "hug," or stay close to, American units to prevent the delivery of supporting air and artillery fire. Unable to prepare a landing zone to receive reinforcements or to evacuate casualties, the beleaguered Americans withstood repeated enemy assaults. During the afternoon the Viet Cong ceased their attack and withdrew. Next morning, when reinforcements arrived, the brigade pursued the enemy, finding evidence that he had suffered heavy casualties. Such operations inflicted losses but failed either to destroy the enemy's base or to prevent him from returning to it later on.

Like the airborne brigade, the 1st Infantry Division initially divided its efforts. In addition to securing its base camps north of Saigon, the division helped South Vietnamese forces clear an area west of the capital

in the vicinity of Cu Chi in Hau Nghia Province. Reacting to reports of enemy troop concentrations, units of the division launched a series of operations in the fall of 1965 and early 1966 that entailed quick forays into the Ho Bo and Boi Loi woods, the Michelin Rubber Plantation, the Rung Sat swamp, and War Zones C and D.

But the defense of Saigon was the first duty of the 1st Infantry Division ("Big Red One") as well as of the 25th Infantry Division, which arrived in the winter of 1966. The 1st Infantry Division took up a position protecting the northern approaches, blocking Highway 13 from the Cambodian border. The 25th guarded the western approaches, chiefly Highway 1 and the Saigon River. The two brigades of the 25th Division served also as a buffer between Saigon and the enemy's base areas in Tay Ninh Province. Westmoreland hoped, however, that the 25th Division would loosen the insurgents'



*An Air Force B-52 bombards an enemy base in III Corps.*

tenacious hold on Hau Nghia as well. Here, American soldiers found to their amazement that the division's camp at Cu Chi had been constructed atop an extensive Viet Cong tunnel complex. Extending over an area of several miles, this subterranean network, one of several in the region, contained hospitals, command centers, and storage sites. The complex, though partially destroyed by Army "tunnel rats," was never completely eliminated and remained usable by the enemy for the duration of the war. The 25th Infantry Division worked closely with South Vietnamese Army and paramilitary forces throughout 1966 and 1967 to foster pacification in Hau Nghia and to secure its own base. But suppressing insurgency in Hau Nghia proved as difficult as eradicating the tunnels at Cu Chi.



*Troops of the 1st Infantry Division flush the Viet Cong from a tunnel near Saigon.*

As the number of Army combat units in Vietnam grew larger, Westmoreland established two corps-size commands, I Field Force in the II Corps area and II Field Force in the III Corps area. Reporting directly to the MACV commander, the field force commander was the senior Army tactical commander in his area and the senior U.S. adviser to South Vietnamese Army forces there. Working closely with his South Vietnamese counterpart, he coordinated South Vietnamese and American operations by establishing territorial priorities for combat and pacification efforts. Through his deputy senior adviser, a position established in 1967, the field force commander kept abreast both of the activities of U.S. sector (province) and subsector (district) advisers and of the progress of the South Vietnamese government's pacification efforts. The I Corps had a similar arrangement, where the commander of the III Marine Amphibious Force was the equivalent of a field force commander. Only in IV Corps, in the Mekong Delta where few American combat units served, did Westmoreland choose not to establish a corps-size command. There, the senior U.S. adviser served as COMUSMACV's representative; he commanded Army advisory and support units but no combat units.

Although Army commanders in III Corps were eager to seek out and engage enemy main-force units in their strongholds along the Cambodian border, operations at first were devoted to base and area security and to clearing and rehabilitating roads. The 1st Infantry Division's first major encounter with the Viet Cong occurred in November 1965, as division elements carried out a routine road security operation along Highway 13 in the vicinity of the village of Bau Bang. Trapping convoys along Highway 13 had long been a profitable Viet Cong tactic. On this occasion, ambushed by a large, well-entrenched enemy force, division troops reacted aggressively and mounted a successful counterattack. But

the road was by no means secured; close to enemy bases, the Cambodian border, and Saigon, Highway 13 would be the site of several major battles for the rest of the war.

Roads were a major concern of U.S. commanders. In some operations, infantrymen provided security as Army engineers improved neglected routes. Defoliants and the Rome plow—a bulldozer modified with a sharp front blade—removed from the sides of important highways the jungle growth that provided cover for Viet Cong ambushes. Road-clearing operations also contributed to pacification by providing peasants with secure access to local markets. In III Corps, with its important road network radiating from Saigon, ground mobility was as essential as airmobility for the conduct of military operations. Without as many helicopters as the airmobile division had, the 1st and 25th Infantry Divisions, like all Army units in South Vietnam, strained the resources of their own aviation support units and of other Army aviation units providing area support to optimize the airmobile capacity for each operation. Nevertheless, on many occasions the Army found itself road bound.

Road and convoy security was also the original justification for introducing Army mechanized and armor units into South Vietnam in late 1965. At first Westmoreland was reluctant to bring heavy mechanized equipment into South Vietnam, for it seemed ill suited either to counterinsurgency operations or to operations during the monsoon season, when all but a few roads were impassable. Armor advocates pressed Westmoreland to reconsider his policy. After a successful mechanized operation near Cu Chi in the spring of 1966, Westmoreland reversed his original policy and requested deployment of the 11th Armored Cavalry Regiment (ACR), with its full complement of M48A3 Patton tanks, to Vietnam. The regiment set up its base near Xuan Loc, north-east of Saigon.

Route security was only the first step in carving out a larger role for Army mechanized forces. Facing an enemy who employed no armor, American mechanized units, often in conjunction with airmobile assaults, acted both as blocking or holding forces and as assault or reaction forces, where terrain permitted. Jungle bashing, as offensive mechanized and armor operations were sometimes called, had its uses but also its limitations. The intimidating presence of tanks and armored personnel carriers was often nullified by their cumbersomeness and noise, which alerted the enemy to an impending attack. The Viet Cong also took countermeasures to immobilize tracked vehicles. Crude tank traps, locally manufactured mines (often made of plastic to thwart discovery by metal detectors), and well-aimed rocket or recoilless rifle rounds could disable a tank or a personnel carrier. Together with the dust and tropical humidity, such weapons placed a heavy burden on Army maintenance units. Yet mechanized units brought the allies enhanced mobility and firepower and often were essential to counter ambushes or destroy an enemy force protected by bunkers.

As Army strength increased in III Corps, Westmoreland encouraged his units to operate farther afield. In early 1966 intelligence reports indicated that enemy strength and activity were increasing in many of his base areas. In two operations during the early spring of 1966, units of the 1st and 25th Infantry Divisions discovered Viet Cong training

**The intimidating presence of tanks and armored personnel carriers was often nullified by their cumbersomeness and noise, which alerted the enemy to an impending attack.**

camps and supply dumps, some of the sites honeycombed with tunnels. But they failed to engage major enemy forces. As Army units made the deepest penetration of War Zone C since 1961, all signs pointed to the foe's hasty withdrawal into Cambodia.

Then in May 1966 an ominous buildup of enemy forces, among them North Vietnamese Army regiments that had infiltrated south, was detected in Phuoc Long and Binh Long Provinces in northern III Corps. U.S. commanders viewed the buildup as a portent of the enemy's spring offensive, plans for which included an attack on the district town of Loc Ninh and on a nearby Special Forces camp. The 1st Division under Maj. Gen. William E. DePuy responded, sending a brigade to secure Highway 13. But the threat to Loc Ninh heightened in early June, when regiments of the Viet Cong *9th People's Liberation Armed Forces (PLAF) Division* took up positions around the town. The arrival of American reinforcements apparently prevented an assault. About a week later, however, an enemy regiment was spotted in fortified positions in a rubber plantation adjacent to Loc Ninh. Battered by massive air and artillery strikes, the regiment was dislodged and its position overrun. Americans recorded other successes: trapping Viet Cong ambushers in a counterambush, securing Loc Ninh, and spoiling the enemy's spring offensive. The enemy continued to underestimate the mobility and firepower that U.S. commanders could bring to bear.

By the summer of 1966 Westmoreland had stopped the losing trend of a year earlier and could begin the second phase of his general campaign strategy. This entailed aggressive operations to search out and destroy enemy main-force units in addition to continued efforts to improve security in the populated areas of III Corps. For Operation ATTLEBORO he sent the 196th Light Infantry Brigade and the 3d Brigade, 4th Infantry Division, to Tay Ninh Province to bolster the security of the province seat and search for enemy supplies. Westmoreland's challenge prompted COSVN to send the *9th PLAF Division* on a countersweep, the enemy's term for operations to counter allied search and destroy tactics. Moving deeper into the countryside, the recently arrived and inexperienced 196th Light Infantry Brigade sparred with the Viet Cong. Then an intense battle erupted as elements of the brigade were isolated and surprised by a large enemy force.

Operation ATTLEBORO quickly grew to a multidivision struggle as American commanders sought to maintain contact with the Viet Cong and to aid their own surrounded forces. Within a matter of days, elements of the 1st and 25th Infantry Divisions, the 173d Airborne Brigade, and the 11th ACR had converged on Tay Ninh Province. Control of ATTLEBORO passed in turn from the 25th to the 1st Infantry Division and finally to Lt. Gen. Jonathan O. Seaman's II Field Force, making it the first Army operation in South Vietnam to be controlled by a corps-size headquarters. With over 22,000 U.S. troops participating, the battle had become the largest of the war. Yet combat occurred most often at the platoon and company levels, frequently at night. As the number of American troops increased, the *9th PLAF Division* shied away, withdrawing across the Cambodian border. Then Army forces departed, leaving to the Special Forces the task of detecting the enemy's inevitable return.

As the threat to Tay Ninh Province abated, Westmoreland turned his attention to the enemy's secret zones near Saigon, among them the so-called Iron Triangle in Binh Duong Province. Harboring the headquarters of *Military Region 4*, the Communist command that directed military and terrorist activity in and around the capital, this stronghold had gone undisturbed for several years. Westmoreland hoped to find the command center, disrupt Viet Cong activity in the capital region, and allow South Vietnamese forces to accelerate pacification and uproot the stubborn Viet Cong political organization that flourished in many villages and hamlets.

Operation CEDAR FALLS began on January 8, 1967, with the objectives of destroying the *Military Region 4* headquarters, interdicting the movement of enemy forces into the major war zones in III Corps, and defeating Viet Cong units encamped there. Like ATTLEBORO before it, CEDAR FALLS tapped the manpower and resources of nearly every major Army unit in the corps area. A series of preliminary maneuvers brought Army units into position. Several air assaults sealed off the Iron Triangle, exploiting the natural barriers of the rivers that formed two of its boundaries. Then American units began a series of sweeps to push the enemy toward the blocking forces. At the village of Ben Suc, long under the sway of the insurgents, sixty helicopters carrying Lt. Col. Alexander M. Haig's 1st Battalion, 26th Infantry, 1st Infantry Division, descended into seven landing zones in less than a minute. Ben Suc was surrounded, its entire population evacuated, and the village and its tunnel complex destroyed. But insurgent forces had fled before the heliborne assault. As CEDAR FALLS progressed, U.S. troops destroyed hundreds of enemy fortifications, captured large quantities of supplies and food, and evacuated other hamlets. Contact with the enemy was fleeting. Most of the Viet Cong, including the high-level cadre of the regional command, had escaped, sometimes infiltrating through allied lines.

By the time Army units left the Iron Triangle, MACV had already received reports that Viet Cong and North Vietnamese Army regiments were returning to War Zone C in preparation for a spring offensive.

This time Westmoreland hoped to prevent Communist forces' escaping into Cambodia, as they had in ATTLEBORO. From forward field positions established during earlier operations, elements of the 1st and 25th Infantry Divisions, the 196th Light Infantry Brigade, and the 11th ACR launched JUNCTION CITY, moving rapidly to establish a cordon around the war zone and to begin a new sweep of the base area. As airmobile and mechanized units moved into positions on the morning of February 22, elements of the 173d Airborne Brigade made the only parachute drop of the Vietnam War—and the first combat airborne assault since the Korean War—to



*A battery of 105-mm. howitzers from the 25th Infantry Division uses high-angle fire in the western highlands.*

establish a blocking position near the Cambodian border. Then other U.S. units entered the horseshoe-shaped area of operations through its open end.

Despite the emphasis on speed and surprise, Army units did not encounter many enemy troops at the outset. As the operation entered its second phase, however, American forces concentrated their efforts in the eastern portion of War Zone C, close to Highway 13. Here, several violent battles erupted as Communist forces tried to isolate and defeat individual units and possibly also to screen the retreat of their comrades into Cambodia. On March 20 a mechanized unit of the 9th Infantry Division was attacked and nearly overrun along Highway 13 near the battered village of Bau Bang. The combined firepower of armored cavalry, supporting artillery, and close air support finally caused the enemy to break contact. The next day, at Firebase GOLD, in the vicinity of Suoi Tre, an infantry and an artillery battalion of the 25th Infantry Division engaged the *272d PLAF Regiment*. Behind an intense, walking mortar barrage, enemy troops breached GOLD's defensive perimeter and rushed into the base. Man-to-man combat ensued. Disaster was averted when Army artillerymen lowered their howitzers and fired beehive artillery rounds containing hundreds of dart-like projectiles directly into the oncoming enemy. The last major encounter with enemy troops during JUNCTION CITY occurred on April 1, when elements of two Viet Cong regiments, the *271st* and the *70th* (the latter directly subordinate to COSVN) attacked a battalion of the 1st Infantry Division in a night defensive position deep in War Zone C, near the Cambodian border. The lopsided casualties—over 600 enemy killed in contrast to 17 Americans—forcefully illustrated once again the U.S. ability to call in overwhelmingly superior fire support by artillery, armed helicopters, and tactical aircraft.

In the wake of JUNCTION CITY, MACV's attention reverted to the still-critical security conditions around Saigon. The 1st Infantry Division returned to War Zone D to search for the *271st PLAF Regiment* and to disrupt the insurgents' lines of communications between War Zones C and D. Despite two major contacts, the main body of the regiment eluded its American pursuers. Army units again returned to the Iron Triangle between April and July 1967, after enemy forces were detected in their old stronghold. Supplies and documents were found in quantities even larger than those discovered in CEDAR FALLS. Once again, however, encounters with the Communists were fleeting. The enemy's reappearance in the Iron Triangle and War Zone D, combined with rocket and mortar attacks on U.S. bases around Saigon, heightened Westmoreland's concern about the security of the capital. When the 1st Infantry Division's base at Phuoc Vinh and Bien Hoa Air Base were attacked in mid-1967, the division mounted counterattacks. Other operations swept the jungles and villages of Bien Hoa Province and sought once again to support pacification in Hau Nghia Province.

These actions highlighted a basic problem. The large, multidivision operations into the enemy's war zones produced some benefits for the pacification campaign. By keeping enemy main-force units at bay, Westmoreland impeded their access to heavily populated areas and prevented them from reinforcing Viet Cong provincial and district forces. Yet when American units were shifted to the interior, the local Viet



*Men of the 199th Light Infantry Brigade and a South Vietnamese ranger carry out a pacification mission near Saigon.*

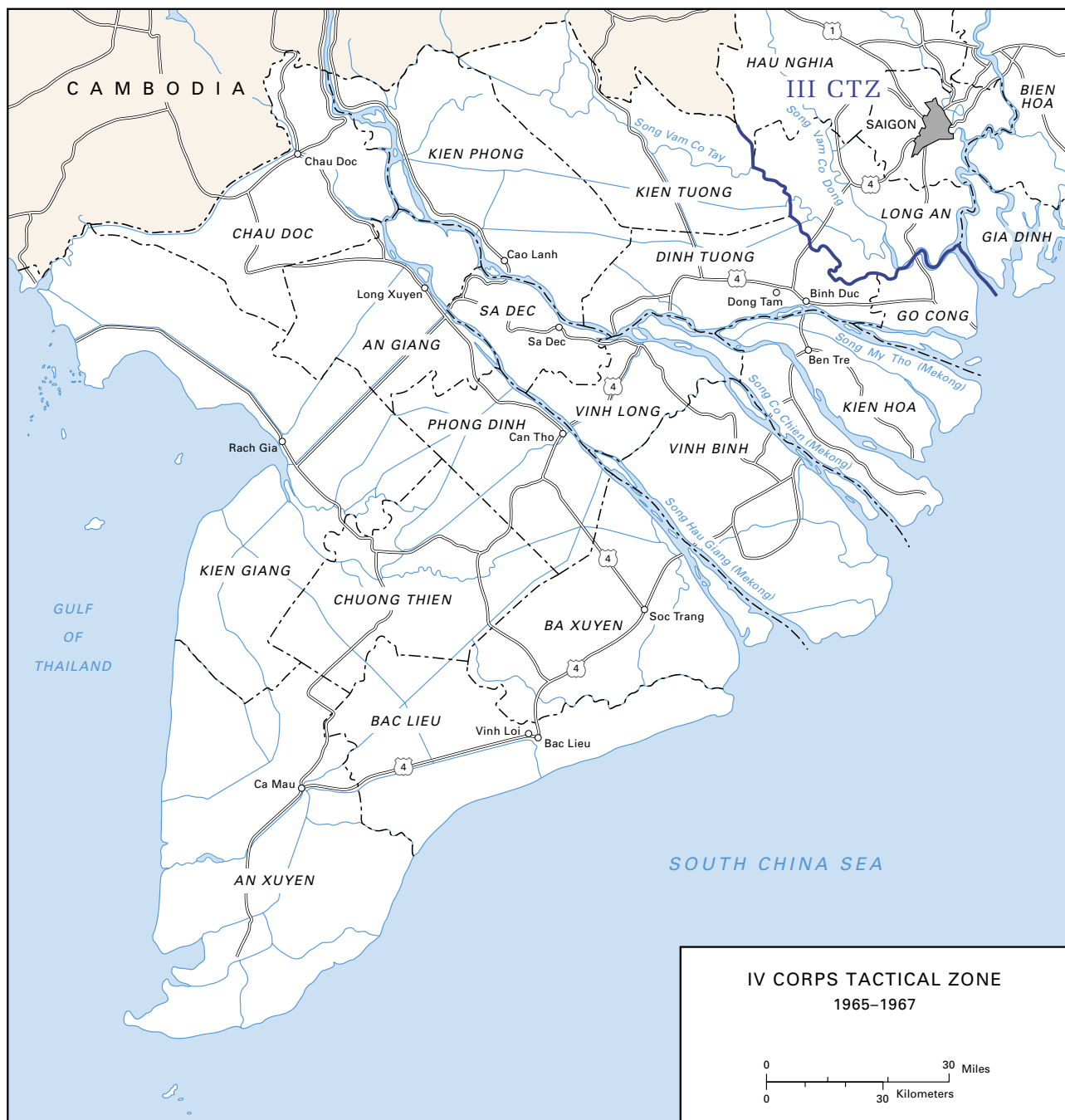
Cong units gained a measure of relief. Westmoreland faced a strategic dilemma: he could not afford to keep substantial forces away from their bases for more than a few months at a time without jeopardizing local security. Unless he received additional forces, Westmoreland would always be torn between two operational imperatives. By the summer of 1967 MACV's likelihood of receiving more combat troops, beyond those scheduled to deploy during the latter half of the year and in early 1968, had become remote. In Washington, the administration turned down his request for an additional 200,000 men.

Meanwhile, the 9th Infantry Division and the 199th Light Infantry Brigade arrived in South Vietnam. Westmoreland stationed the brigade at Bien Hoa, where it embarked on FAIRFAX, a year-long operation in which it worked closely

with a South Vietnamese ranger group to improve security in Gia Dinh Province, which surrounded the capital. Units of the brigade paired off with South Vietnamese rangers and, working closely with paramilitary and police forces, sought to uproot the very active Viet Cong local forces and destroy the enemy's political underground. Typical activities included ambushes by combined forces; cordon and search operations in villages and hamlets, often in conjunction with the Vietnamese police; psychological and civic-action operations; surprise roadblocks to search for contraband and Viet Cong supporters; and training programs to develop proficient military and local self-defense capabilities.

Likewise, the 9th Infantry Division set up bases east and south of Saigon. One brigade deployed to Camp BEARCAT east of Saigon; another set up camp at Tan An in Long An Province, southwest of the capital. The latter brigade sought to secure portions of Highway 4, an important north-south artery connecting Saigon with the rice-rich lower delta. Farther south, the 2d Brigade, 9th Infantry Division, established its base at Dong Tam in Dinh Tuong Province in IV Corps. (*Map 14*) Located in the midst of rice paddies and swamps, Dong Tam was created by Army engineers with sand dredged from the My Tho River. From this 600-acre base, the brigade began a series of riverine operations unique to the Army's experience in South Vietnam.

To patrol and fight in the inundated marshlands and rice paddies and along the numerous canals and waterways crossing the Mekong Delta, the Army modernized the concept of riverine warfare employed by Union forces on the Mississippi River during the Civil War and by the French during the Indochina War. The Mobile Riverine Force utilized a joint Army-Navy task force controlled by a ground commander. In



Map 14

contrast to amphibious operations, where control reverts to the ground commander only after the force is ashore, riverine warfare was an extension of land combat, with infantry units traveling by boats rather than by trucks or tracked vehicles. Aided by a Navy river-support squadron and river-assault squadron, infantrymen were housed on barracks ships and supported by gunships or fire support boats called monitors. Howitzers and mortars mounted on barges provided artillery support. The

2d Brigade, 9th Infantry Division, began operations against the Cam Son Secret Zone, approximately ten miles west of Dong Tam, in May 1967.

Meanwhile, the war of main-force units along the borders waxed and waned in relation to seasonal weather cycles, which affected the enemy's pattern of logistical activity, his ability to infiltrate men and supplies from North Vietnam, and his penchant for meticulous preparation of the battlefield. By the fall of 1967 enemy activity had increased again in the base areas, and sizable forces began appearing along South Vietnam's border from the demilitarized zone to III Corps. By year's end, American forces had returned to War Zone C to screen the Cambodian border to prevent Communist forces from reentering South Vietnam. Units of the 25th Infantry Division that had been conducting operations in the vicinity of Saigon moved to the border. Elements of the 1st Infantry Division had resumed road-clearing operations along Highway 13, but the division soon faced another major enemy effort to capture Loc Ninh. On October 29 Viet Cong units assaulted the CIDG camp and the district command post, breaching the defense perimeter. Intense air and artillery fire prevented its complete loss. Within a few hours, South Vietnamese and U.S. reinforcements reached Loc Ninh, their arrival made possible by the enemy's failure to capture the local airstrip.

When the buildup at Loc Ninh ended, four Army battalions were positioned within the town and between the town and the Cambodian border. During the next two days allied units warded off repeated enemy attacks as Communist forces desperately tried to score a victory. Tactical air support and artillery fire prevented the enemy from massing, though he outnumbered allied forces by about ten to one. At the end of a ten-day battle, over 800 enemy were left on the battlefield, while allied deaths numbered 50. Some 452 close air support sorties, 8 B-52 bomber strikes, and 30,125 rounds of artillery had been directed at the enemy.

## II Corps Battles, 1966–1967

Despite the relative calm that followed the Ia Drang fighting in late 1965, the North Vietnamese left no doubt of their intent to continue infiltration and to challenge American forces in II Corps. In March 1966 enemy forces overran the Special Forces camp at A Shau on the remote western border of I Corps. (*Map 15*) The loss of the camp had long-term consequences, enabling the enemy to make the A Shau Valley a major logistical base and staging area for forces infiltrating into the piedmont and coastal areas. The loss also highlighted certain differences between operational concepts of the Army and the marines. Concentrating their efforts in the coastal districts of I Corps and lacking the more extensive helicopter support Army units enjoyed, the marines avoided operations in the highlands. On the other hand, Army commanders in II Corps sought to engage the enemy as close to the border as possible and were quick to respond to threats to Special Forces camps in the highlands. Operations near the border were essential to Westmoreland's efforts to keep main-force enemy units as far as possible from the population and to wear them down.



Map 15

For Hanoi's strategists, however, a reciprocal relation existed between highlands and coastal regions. Here, as in the south, the enemy directed his efforts to preserving his own influence among the population near the coast, from which he derived considerable support. At the same time he maintained a constant military threat in the highlands to divert allied forces from pacification efforts. In its broad outlines, Hanoi's strategy to cope with U.S. forces was the same employed by the Viet Minh against the French and by Communist forces in 1964 and 1965 against the South Vietnamese Army. Whether it would be equally successful remained to be seen.

The airmobile division spent the better part of the next two years fighting Viet Cong and North Vietnamese units in the coastal plain and piedmont valleys of Binh Dinh Province. (*Map 16*) Here the enemy had deep roots, especially in the piedmont's craggy hills and jungle-covered uplands, where local and main-force Viet Cong units had long flourished by exacting food, taxes, and recruits from the lowland population through a well-entrenched shadow government. Pacification efforts were almost dead. Starting in early 1966, the 1st Cavalry Division, now under the command of Maj. Gen. John Norton, embarked on a series of operations against the *2d PLAF*, *12th PAVN*, and *22d PAVN Regiments* of the *3d PAVN Division*. For the most part the 1st Cavalry Division operated in the Bong Son plain and the adjacent hills, from which enemy units reinforced the hamlet and the village guerrillas who gathered taxes, food, and recruits. As in the highlands, the division exploited its airmobility, using helicopters to establish positions in the upper reaches of the valleys. The division sought to flush the enemy from his hid-

ing places and drive him toward the coast, where American, South Vietnamese, and South Korean forces held blocking positions. When trapped, the enemy was attacked by ground, naval, and air fire. The scheme was a new version of an old tactical concept, the "hammer and anvil," with the coastal plain and the natural barrier formed by the South China Sea forming the anvil, or killing zone. Collectively the operations became known as the Binh Dinh Pacification Campaign.

For forty-two days elements of the airmobile division scoured the An Lao and Kim Son Valleys, pursuing enemy units that had been surprised and routed from the Bong Son plain. Meanwhile, Marine forces in neighboring Quang Ngai Province in southern I Corps sought to bar the enemy's escape routes to the north. The enemy took heavy casualties, and thousands of civilians fled from the Viet



*UH-1 Hueys pick up soldiers of the 1st Cavalry Division during operations on the Bong Son Plain in 1966.*



Map 16

Cong-dominated valleys to government-controlled areas. Although the influx of refugees taxed the government's already strained relief services, the exodus of peasants weakened the Viet Cong's infrastructure and aimed a psychological blow at the enemy's prestige. The Communists had failed either to confront the Americans or to protect the population over which they had gained control.

After the An Lao Valley operations, units of the airmobile division assaulted another enemy base area, a group of valleys and ridges southwest of the Bong Son plain known as the Crow's Foot or the Eagle's Claw. Here some Army units sought to dislodge the enemy from his upland bases while others established blocking positions at the "toe" of each valley (where it found outlet to the plain). In six weeks over 1,300 enemy soldiers were killed. Enemy forces in northern Binh Dinh Province were temporarily thrown off balance. Beyond this, the long-term effects of the operation were unclear. The 1st Cavalry Division did not stay in one area long enough to exploit its success. Whether the South Vietnamese government could marshal its forces effectively to provide local security and to reassert its political control remained to be seen.

After a brief interlude in the highlands, the division returned to Binh Dinh Province in September 1966. Conditions in the Bong Son area differed little from those the division had first encountered. For the most part, the Viet Cong rather than the South Vietnamese government had been successful in reasserting their authority; pacification was at a standstill. The division devoted most of its resources for the remainder of 1966 and throughout 1967 to supporting renewed pacification efforts. In the fall of 1966, for the first time in a year, all three of the division's brigades were reunited and operating in Binh Dinh Province. Although elements of the division were occasionally transferred to the highlands as the threat there waxed and waned, the general movement of forces was toward the north. Army units increasingly were sent to southern I Corps during 1967, replacing Marine units in operations similar to those in Binh Dinh Province.

Operations on the coast continued through 1967 and into early 1968. In addition to offensive operations against enemy main forces, Army units in Binh Dinh worked in close coordination with South Vietnamese police, Regional and Popular Forces, and the South Vietnamese Army to help the central government gain a foothold in villages and hamlets that the Communists dominated or contested. The 1st Cavalry Division adopted a number of techniques in support of pacification. Army units frequently participated in cordon and search operations: airmobile forces seized positions around a hamlet or village at dawn to prevent the escape of local forces or cadres, while South Vietnamese authorities undertook a methodical house-to-house search. The Vietnamese checked the legal status of inhabitants, took a census, and interrogated suspected Viet Cong to obtain more information about the enemy's local political and military apparatus. At the same time allied forces engaged in a variety of civic action and psychological operations, and specially trained pacification cadres established the rudiments of local government and provided various social and economic services. At other times, the division participated in "checkpoint and snatch" operations establishing surprise roadblocks and inspecting traffic on roads frequented by the insurgents.

In many respects, the Binh Dinh campaign was a microcosm of Westmoreland's overall campaign strategy. It showed clearly the intimate relation between the war against enemy main-force units and the fight for pacification waged by the South Vietnamese, and it demonstrated the effectiveness of the airmobile concept. After two years of persistent pursuit of the *3d PAVN Division*, the 1st Cavalry Division had reduced the combat effectiveness of each of its three regiments. By the end of 1967 the threat to Binh Dinh Province posed by enemy main-force units had been markedly reduced. The airmobile division's operations against the North Vietnamese *3d Division*, as well as its frequent role in operations directly in support of pacification, had weakened local guerrilla forces and created an environment favorable to pacification.

The campaign in Binh Dinh also exposed the vulnerabilities of Westmoreland's campaign strategy. Despite repeated defeats at the hands of the Americans, the three enemy regiments still existed. They contrived to find respite and a measure of rehabilitation, building their strength anew with recruits filtering down from the North, with others found in country, and with Viet Cong units consolidated into their ranks. Although much weakened, Communist forces persistently returned to areas the 1st Cavalry Division had cleared. Even more threatening to the allied cause, the central government's pacification efforts languished as South Vietnamese forces failed in many instances to provide security to the villages and effective police action to root out local Viet Cong cadres. And the government, dealing with an already-skeptical population, failed to grant the political, social, and economic benefits it had promised.

### Progress or Stalemate?

The allies could not concentrate their efforts everywhere as they had in strategic Binh Dinh. The expanse of the highlands compelled Army operations there to proceed with economy of force. During 1966 and 1967, the Americans engaged in a constant search for tactical concepts and techniques to maximize their advantages of firepower and mobility and to compensate for the constraints of time, distance, difficult terrain, and an inviolable border. Here the war was fought primarily to prevent the incursion of North Vietnamese units into South Vietnam and to erode their combat strength. In the highlands, each side pursued a strategy of military confrontation, seeking to weaken the fighting forces and will of its opponent through attrition. Each sought military victories to convince opposing leaders of the futility of continuing the contest.

For Americans the most difficult problem was locating the enemy. Yet Communist strategists sometimes created threats to draw U.S. troops into ambushes. Recurrent menaces to Special Forces camps reflected the enemy's seasonal cycle of operations, his desire to harass and eliminate such camps, and his hope of luring allied forces into situations where he held the military advantages. Thus Army operations in the highlands during 1966 and 1967 were characterized by wide-ranging, often futile searches punctuated by sporadic but intense battles fought usually at the enemy's initiative.

For the first few months of 1966, the Communists lay low. In May, however, a significant concentration of North Vietnamese forces ap-

**The Americans engaged in a constant search for tactical concepts and techniques to maximize their advantages of firepower and mobility and to compensate for the constraints of time, distance, difficult terrain, and an inviolable border.**

peared in Pleiku and Kontum Provinces. The 1st Brigade, 101st Airborne Division, the reserve of I Field Force, was summoned to Pleiku and subsequently moved elements to Dak To, a CIDG camp in central Kontum Province, to assist a besieged South Vietnamese force at the nearby government post at Tou Morong. Although the *24th PAVN Regiment* had surrounded Tou Morong, allied forces secured the road to the beleaguered base and evacuated the government troops, leaving one battalion of the 101st Division at the abandoned camp and reinforcing with two companies to the north. On June 9, during a sweep of the battlefield, one of the companies ran into the North Vietnamese, who threatened to overrun it. Facing disaster, the commander called in air strikes just forward of his position to stop the enemy's human-wave attacks. Relief arrived the next morning, as helicopters carried additional elements of the brigade to the battlefield to pursue and trap the North Vietnamese. Fighting to close off the enemy's escape routes, the Americans called in renewed air strikes, including B-52s. By June 20 enemy resistance had ended and the North Vietnamese regiment that had begun the fighting had left behind its dead in its haste to escape to the safety of its Laotian base.

Although the enemy's push in Kontum Province was blunted, the siege of Tou Morong was only one aspect of his summer offensive in the highlands. Suspecting that the North Vietnamese meant to return to the Ia Drang Valley, Westmoreland sent the 3d Brigade, 25th Infantry Division, back into the valley in May. Dividing the area like a checkerboard, the brigade methodically searched each square. Small patrols set out ambushes and operated for several days without resupply to avoid having helicopters reveal their location. After several days in one square, the patrols leapfrogged by helicopter to another. Though the Americans made only light, sporadic contacts, the cumulative toll of enemy killed was equal to many short, violent battles. The Americans made one significant contact in late May near the Chu Pong Massif; running

battles ensued, as the enemy again sought safety in Cambodia. Westmoreland now appealed to Washington for permission to maneuver Army units behind the enemy, possibly into Cambodian territory. But officials refused, fearing international repercussions; the North Vietnamese sanctuary remained inviolate.

Border battles continued, some very sharp. When enemy forces appeared in strength around a Special Forces camp at Plei Djereng in October, elements of the 4th Infantry and 1st Cavalry Divisions rapidly reinforced the camp, clashing with the enemy in firefights during October and November. As North Vietnamese forces began to withdraw through the Plei Trap Valley, the 1st Brigade, 101st Airborne Division, flew from



Infantry Patrol in a Clearing, Roger Blum, 1966

Phu Yen to northern Kontum to try to block their escape but failed to trap them before they reached the border. The 4th Infantry Division continued operations in the highlands. In addition to screening the border to detect infiltration, the division constructed a new road between Pleiku and the highland outpost at Plei Djereng and helped the South Vietnamese government resettle thousands of Montagnards in secure camps. Contact with the enemy generally was light, the heaviest occurring in mid-February 1967 in an area west of the Nam Sathay River near the Cambodian border, when Communist forces unsuccessfully tried to overrun several American firebases. Despite infrequent contacts, however, 4th Division troops killed 700 of the enemy over a period of three months.

In I Corps as well, the enemy seemed intent on fighting the Americans on the borders. Heightened activity along the demilitarized zone drew marines from southern I Corps. Into the area the marines had vacated Army units were transferred from III and II Corps, among them the 196th Light Infantry Brigade, which pulled out of Operation JUNCTION CITY, and the 3d Brigade, 25th Infantry Division, heretofore operating in the II Corps Zone. Together with the 1st Brigade, 101st Airborne Division, these units formed Task Force OREGON, activated at Chu Lai on April 12, 1967, and placed under the operational control of the III Marine Amphibious Force. Army infantry units were now operating in all four of South Vietnam's corps areas.

Once at Chu Lai, the Army forces supported an extensive South Vietnamese pacification effort in Quang Tin and Quang Ngai Provinces. To the north, along the demilitarized zone, Army heavy artillery engaged in almost daily duels with North Vietnamese guns to the north. In Quang Tri Province, the marines fought a hard, twelve-day battle to prevent North Vietnamese forces from dominating the hills surrounding Khe Sanh. The enemy's heightened military activity along the demilitarized zone, which included frontal attacks across it, prompted American officials to begin construction of a barrier consisting of highly sophisticated electronic and acoustical sensors and strong-point defenses manned by allied forces. Known as the McNamara Line, after Secretary of Defense McNamara, who had vigorously promoted the concept, the barrier was to extend across South Vietnam and eventually into Laos. Westmoreland was not enthusiastic about the project. He hesitated to commit large numbers of troops to man the necessary strong points, doubting that the barrier was capable of preventing the enemy from breaching the demilitarized zone. Hence the McNamara Line was never completed and only a limited success in detecting infiltration into the South.

Throughout the summer of 1967, Marine forces endured some of the most intense enemy artillery barrages of the war and fought several battles with North Vietnamese Army units that infiltrated across the 17th Parallel. Their stubborn defense, supported by massive counter-battery fire, naval gunfire, and air attacks, ended the enemy's offensive in northern I Corps, but not before Westmoreland had to divert additional Army units as reinforcements. A brigade of the 1st Cavalry Division and South Korean units were deployed to southern I Corps to replace additional marines who had shifted farther north. The depth of the Army's commitment in I Corps was shown by Task Force OREGON's

**The enemy's heightened military activity along the demilitarized zone, which included frontal attacks across it, prompted American officials to begin construction of a barrier consisting of highly sophisticated electronic and acoustical sensors and strong-point defenses manned by allied forces.**

reorganization as the 23d Infantry Division (Americal). The only Army division to be formed in South Vietnam, its name echoed a famous World War II division that had also been organized in the Pacific.

Even as Westmoreland shifted allied forces from II Corps to I Corps, fighting intensified in the highlands. After Army units made several contacts with enemy forces during May and June, Westmoreland moved the 173d Airborne Brigade from III Corps to II Corps to serve as the I Field Force's strategic reserve. Within a few days, however, the brigade was committed to an effort to forestall enemy attacks against the Special Forces camps of Dak To, Dak Seang, and Dak Pek in Kontum Province. Under the control of the 4th Infantry Division, the operation continued throughout the summer until the enemy threat abated. A few months later, however, reconnaissance patrols in the vicinity of Dak To detected a rapid and substantial buildup of enemy forces in regimental strength. Believing an attack to be imminent, 4th Infantry Division forces reinforced the garrison. In turn the 173d Airborne Brigade returned to the highlands, arriving on November 2. From November 3–15, an estimated 12,000 enemy probed, harassed, and attacked American and South Vietnamese positions along the ridges and hills surrounding the camp. As the attacks grew stronger, more U.S. and South Vietnamese reinforcements were sent, including two battalions from the airmobile division and six South Vietnamese Army battalions. By mid-November allied strength approached 8,000.

Despite daily air and artillery bombardments, the North Vietnamese launched two attacks against Dak To on November 15, destroying two C-130 aircraft and causing severe damage to the camp's ammunition dump. Allied forces strove to dislodge the enemy from the surrounding hills, but the North Vietnamese held fast in fortified positions. The center of enemy resistance was Hill 875. Here, two battalions of Brig.

Gen. Leo H. Schweiter's 173d Airborne Brigade made a slow and painful ascent against determined resistance and under grueling physical conditions, fighting for every foot of ground. Enemy fire was so intense and accurate that at times the Americans were unable to bring in reinforcements by helicopter or to provide fire support. In fighting that resembled the hill battles of the final stage of the Korean War, the confusion at Dak To pitted soldier against soldier in classic infantry battle. In desperation, beleaguered U.S. commanders on Hill 875 called in artillery and even B-52 air strikes perilously close to their own positions. On November 23 American forces at last gained control of Hill 875.

The Battle of Dak To was the longest and most violent in the highlands since the Battle of the Ia Drang two years before. Enemy casualties num-



*Men of the 173d Airborne Brigade prepare for airlift into the Central Highlands in 1967.*

bered in the thousands, with an estimated 1,600 killed. Americans had suffered too. Approximately one-sixth of the 173d Airborne Brigade had become casualties, with 191 killed, 642 wounded, and 15 missing in action. If the Battle of the Ia Drang exemplified airmobility in all its versatility, the battle of Dak To, with the arduous ascent of Hill 875, epitomized infantry combat at its most basic, as well as the crushing effect of supporting air power.

Dak To was only one of several border battles in the waning months of 1967. At Song Be and Loc Ninh in III Corps and all along the northern border of I Corps, the enemy exposed his positions in order to confront U.S. forces in heavy fighting. By the end of 1967 a reinforced brigade of the 1st Infantry Division had again drifted north toward Cambodia and a brigade of the 25th Infantry Division had returned to War Zone C. The enemy's threat in I Corps caused Westmoreland to disperse more Army units. In the vacuum left by their departure, local Viet Cong sought to reconstitute their forces and to reassert their control over the rural population. In turn, Viet Cong revival often was a prelude to the resurgence of Communist military activity at the district and village levels. Hard-pressed to find additional Army units to shift from III Corps and II Corps to I Corps, Westmoreland asked the Army to accelerate deployment of two remaining brigades of the 101st Airborne Division from the United States. Arriving in December 1967, the brigades were added to the growing number of Army units operating in the northern provinces.

While allied forces were under pressure, the border battles of 1967 also led to a reassessment of strategy in Hanoi. Unwavering in their long-term aim of unification, the leaders of North Vietnam recognized that their strategy of military confrontation had failed to stop the American military buildup in the South or to reduce U.S. military pressure on the North. Regular and main-force units had failed to inflict a salient military defeat on American forces. Although the North Vietnamese Army maintained the tactical initiative, Westmoreland had kept its units at bay and in some areas, like Binh Dinh Province, diminished their influence on the contest for control of the rural population. Many Communist military leaders perceived the war to be a stalemate and believed that continuing on their present course would bring diminishing returns, especially if their local forces were drastically weakened.

On the other side, Westmoreland could rightly point to some modest progress in improving South Vietnam's security and to punishing defeats inflicted on several North Vietnamese regiments and divisions. Yet none of his successes were sufficient to turn the tide of the war. The Communists had matched the buildup of American combat forces: the number of enemy divisions in the South increased from one in early 1965 to nine at the start of 1968. Against 363 allied combat battalions, the North Vietnamese and Viet Cong could marshal 209. Despite heavy air attacks against enemy lines of infiltration, the flow of men from the North had continued unabated, even increasing toward the end of 1967.

Although the Military Assistance Command had succeeded in warding off defeat in 1965 and had gained valuable time for the South Vietnamese to concentrate their political and military resources on pacification, security in many areas of South Vietnam had improved

little. More and more, success in the South seemed to depend not only on Westmoreland's ability to hold off and weaken enemy main-force units, but also on the equally important efforts of the South Vietnamese Army, the Regional Forces (RF), the Popular Forces (PF), and a variety of paramilitary and police forces to pacify the countryside. Writing to President Johnson in the spring of 1967, outgoing Ambassador Henry Cabot Lodge warned that if the South Vietnamese "dribble along and do not take advantage of the success which MACV has achieved against the main force and the Army of North Viet-Nam, we must expect that the enemy will lick his wounds, pull himself together and make another attack in '68." Westmoreland's achievements, he added, would be "judged not so much on the brilliant performance of the U.S. troops as on the success in getting [the South Vietnamese Army], RF and PF quickly to function as a first-class ... counter-guerrilla force." Meanwhile, the war appeared to be in a state of equilibrium. Only an extraordinary effort by one side or the other could bring a decision.

### DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. In Vietnam, the helicopter provided allied forces with unprecedented mobility. Describe the helicopter's role in ground combat. What were its drawbacks?
2. During the war, certain officers and civilian analysts said that General Westmoreland paid too much attention to the enemy's main forces and not enough to pacification. How do you think the general would have responded?
3. President Johnson declined to mobilize the reserves when he committed ground troops to Vietnam in 1965. What was the impact of this decision on the U.S. Army for the duration of the war?
4. Until 1970 the enemy's cross-border sanctuaries were off-limits to U.S. ground forces. How did this affect the American conduct of the war?
5. Among the earliest U.S. forces introduced into Vietnam were U.S. Army Special Forces. To what extent were they the ideal force for counterinsurgency? What were their weaknesses?

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